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A.

AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

A DUTCH TALE TOLD IN ENGLISH.

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS,

AUTHOR OF

"THE SIN OF JOOST AVELINGH."



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

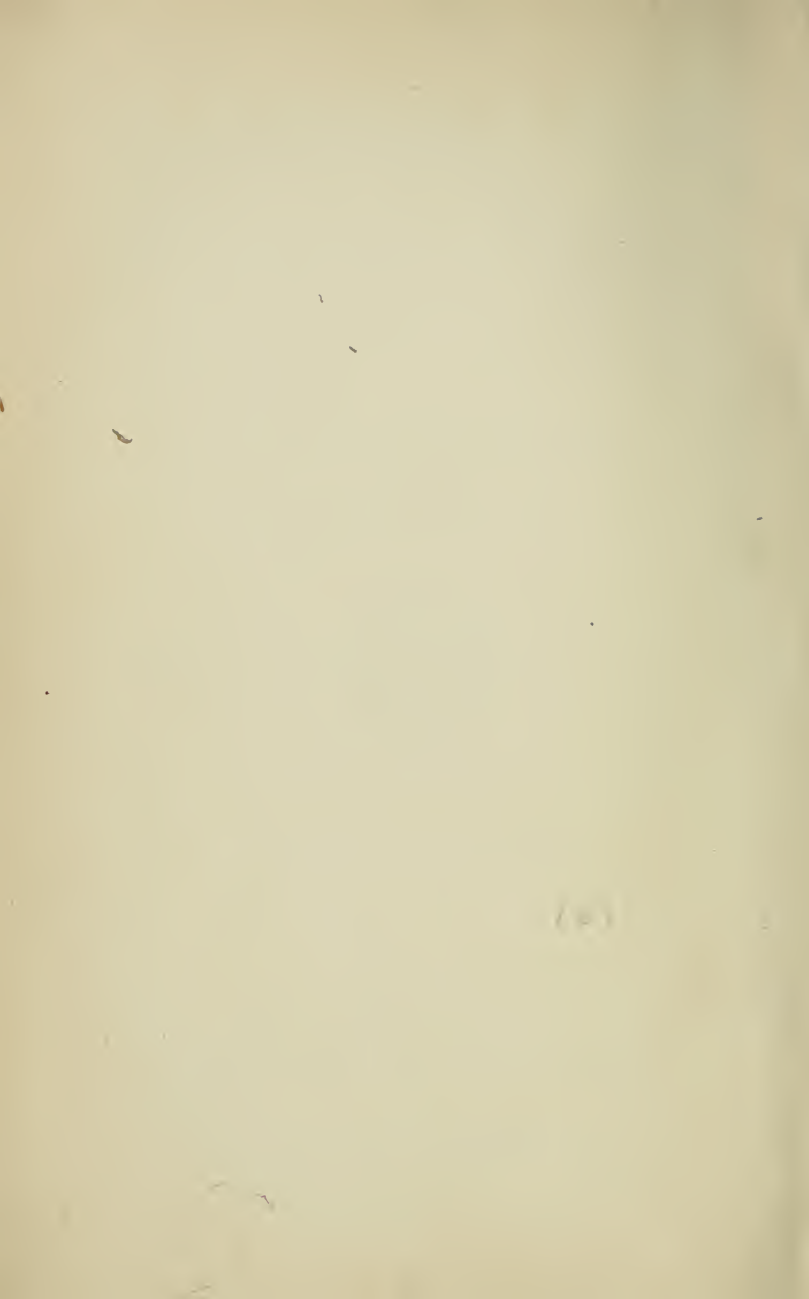
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TO
REGINALD STANLEY FABER

THE AUTHOR OFFERS THE DEDICATION

OF THIS BOOK,

AS A RECOGNITION OF KINDNESS IN THE PAST

AND A PLEA FOR FUTURE FRIENDSHIP.

8 Nov 5 / 1891

For the King 28 Dec 81 Blackwell & Co.



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So many kindly critics have spoken of my former book, "The Sin of Joost Avelingh," as being a translation from the Dutch, that I must here state that it was originally written in English, and that the present story, now for the first time published, has also been written in English only, a language which, though not my native tongue, has become to me quite as dear and, I would fain hope, almost as familiar.

M. M.

KOOPSTAD, HOLLAND,
January 8, 1891.



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AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

IT was on a golden summer evening—a long June sunset, soft and silent—that Mephisto crept into the quiet old heart of Suzanna Varelkamp.

She was sitting in the low verandah of her cottage on the Wyker Road, with her grey knitting in her hands. She always had that grey knitting in her hands. If it rested on her knees for one brief moment, her friends could tell you that some singularly difficult

question—probably of abstruse theology, or else about the linen-basket or the preserves—was troubling Suzanna's mind. Suzanna was a woman of industrious repose. She loved her God and her store-cupboard. She did not, as a rule, love her neighbour over much—little unpleasantnesses in connection with the overhanging apples, or Suzanna's darling cat, were apt to intervene and stifle the seeds of dutifully nurtured benevolence. Nor did she love herself to any excess of unrighteousness, knowing, with a perfervid knowledge, that she was altogether abominable and corrupt, and “even as a beast before Thee,” from her mother's womb upwards—a remote period.

The gentle laburnum at her side was slowly gilding over in the sinking sunlight, fragile and drooping and a little lack-a-daisical, very unlike the natty old woman, bolt-upright in her basket-chair. Just across

the road a knot of poplars quivered to the still air, and in the pale, far heaven, companies of swallows circled with rapid, aimless swoops. Nature was slowly—very, very slowly, tranquilly, dreamingly, deliciously, settling itself to sleep—silent already but for a blackbird shrilling excitedly through the jasmine-bushes by the porch.

Another bird woke up at that moment, and cried out from Suzanna's bedroom—through all the quiet little house—that it was half-past seven. Then he went to sleep again for exactly half an hour, for, like all man's imitations of God's works, he is too hideously logical to be artistic. And Mejuffrouw Varelkamp began to wonder why Betje did not bring out the "tea-water," for every evening the sun went down at another moment—Providence, being all-provident, was able to superintend such irregularities—but every evening, at half-past

seven to the minute, Mejuffrouw Varelkamp must have her "tea-water," or the little cosmos of her household arrangements could not survive the shock. "It is difficult enough for one woman to superintend one servant!" said Suzanna. "It is possible, but it is all-engrossing, and requires concentration of power and of will. And, not being Providence, I cannot regulate disorder." The "regulation of disorder," as she called it—the breaking away from straight lines and simple addition—was one of Suzanna's bugbears. And so Betje was efficiently superintended; none but she knew how engrossingly. And, evening after evening, the cuckoo stepped over his threshold, and Betje out of her kitchen, so harmoniously, that you might almost have fancied they walked in step.

Somebody was coming up the quiet road, a Dutch road, straight and tidy, avenue-like, between its double border of majestic

beeches,—somebody whose walk sounded un-rhythmic through the stillness—two people evidently, and not walking in step, these two—one with a light, light-hearted swing, the other with a melancholy thump, and a little skip to make it good again. But their whistling, the sweet, low whistling of an old Reformed psalm-tune, was in better unison than their walking, though even here, perhaps, the softer voice seemed just a shade too low. Had there been all the falseness of a German band in that subdued music, Suzanna would not have detected it; her heart—and that far more than her ear—recognized with tranquil contentment the drawn-out melody, calm and plaintive, and her bright eye brightened, for just one little, unnoticeable moment, at the accents of the clearer voice. That sudden brightening would flash every now and then over a face hard and cold enough by nature; nobody

ever noticed it except Suzanna's sister, the rich widow Barsselius, not Suzanna herself, least of all the young scapegrace who was its only cause.

Dutch psalm-singing leaves plenty of time for the singers to go to sleep and wake up again between each succeeding note. The whistlers came into sight before they had finished many lines. They stopped suddenly upon perceiving the old lady under the verandah, and both took off their hats.

“Dominé,” said Suzanna, “how can you countenance whistling the word of God?”

The young man thus addressed looked up with a quiet twinkle in his eye. He had a pale face and a thoughtful smile; he was slightly deformed, and it was he that walked lame.

“With pipe and with timbrel, Juffrouw,” he answered gaily. “Old Baas Vroom has just been telling me that he won't give up

smoking, in spite of the doctor, because he has read in his Bible how the people praised the Lord with their pipes."

Suzanna never smiled unless she approved of the joke. She revered the minister, and she patronised the young believer; it was difficult sometimes properly to blend the two feelings. But, at the bottom of her tough old heart, she thoroughly liked her nephew's friend. "He will make a capital pastor," she said to herself (unconsciously), "when he has unlearned a little of his so-called morality and taken in good sound theology instead. Not the milk of the Word with Professor Wyfel's unfiltered water, but strong meat with plenty of Old Testament sap."

"Come in here," she said severely, "I want to talk to you about that Vrouw Wede. I told her this morning that she could not have any more needlework from the Society

unless she sent her son to the catechising. She says the boy's father won't have him go, because it tires his head. And I warned her I should report her to the Dominé." Mejuffrouw Varelkamp's voice always dropped into exactly the same tone of hereditary reverence over that word. "Come in, Jakob, and you shall have a 'cat's tongue,' * even though it isn't Sunday."

Betje had brought out the tea-things meanwhile, triumphantly, under cover of the minister's presence, the shining copper peat-stove and the costly little Japanese tea-cups, not much larger than a thimble, on their lacquered tray. "Take away the tea-stove, Betje," said Suzanna. "The peat smells." She said so every now and then—once a week, perhaps—being firmly convinced of the truth of her assertion, and Betje, who never believed her, and who never smelled

* A kind of biscuit. .

anything under carbolic acid, whisked away the bright pail and kettle from beside her mistress's chair and brought them back again unaltered. "That is right, Betje," said Mejuffrouw. "How often must I tell you that a stove which smells of peat is full proof in itself of an incompetent servant?"

"Humph," said Betje. For even the very best of housekeepers have their little failings, and fancies, and fads.

"Come in, Jakob," said Suzanna. "Not you, Arnout. You can go down to the village and fetch me a skein of my dark grey wool. The dark grey, mind, at twelve stivers. You know which."

"You know which!" The young man had grown up with the dark grey wool and the light grey wool and the blue wool for a border. Ten stivers, twelve stivers, fourteen stivers. He knew them better than his catechism, and he knew that very well too.

He touched his hat slightly—he was always courteous to his aunt, as who would not have been?—and he strolled away down the green highway into the shadows and the soft, warm sunset, taking up, as he went, the old psalm-tune that had been on his lips before.

It was the melody of the fifty-first psalm. Suzanna had good cause to remember it in after years.

And it was into this calm green paradise of an old maid's heart, a paradise of straight gravel-paths and clipped box-trees and neat dahlia beds, that soft Mephisto crept.





CHAPTER II.

AUNT AND NEPHEW.

ARNOUT—or Arnold—Oostrum was twenty ; straight-limbed—not, thank God ! with that gnawing pain in the thigh like his friend Jakob te Bakel ; broad-chested and strong-hearted, or, at least, so he thought. A young fellow with a capital digestion, and a bright contentment with himself and all the world about him. Ready to please everybody—himself included—as much as lay in his power, and convinced that a good deal did lie in his power, as what young fellow of twenty is not ? A good digestion. Oh, mystic charm of the words to those who have lost their meaning ! Men speak of a proud stomach. They should

speaking also of a happy, a contented one. No wonder he carries his head high who can rely upon that lower organ. No pestilence can smite him by day, no poisonous heart-pang by night. The conscience seldom awakes till the stomach has gone to sleep. And our bowels of compassion—ah well, some sad thoughts are best left unspoken, for fear of a world that too easily cries “Fie!”

Is life worth living? The question has been debated by many of the wisest through the ages; and at last there came a great unknown philosopher, and he quietly laid the answer at the feet of that sage of sages, *Punch*. “It depends,” said that great teacher, “on the liver.”

To Arnout Oostrum life was very much worth living indeed. He had never felt another pain than toothache or a thrashing. Not that his aunt had ever struck him in her life. No, no; that would have seemed a

“ruit coelum” to the boy, whose punishments, insignificant enough in themselves, had been terrible because so rare. His masters, with whom he had more frequently come into conflict, had only treated him to that civilised torture of extra tasks which has completely replaced corporal chastisement in Dutch schools; the blows and buffets, therefore, which he had received during his passage through the world thus far were such as fall to the lot of each one of us, and are usually dealt us by our most familiar friends. Early in life, some of his school-fellows had licked him, and he had licked many more. And nature had been very gracious to him, and had permitted him to swallow with impunity a larger number of unripe apples than can be safely stowed away by most other boys of his size.

His very earliest recollections were of contentment and enjoyment—play, pleasure,

and sugar-plums ; a placid sea, with occasional storm-flashes ; a kind lady, who was always kind, and a kind gentleman who could sometimes be passionate ; and then the kind lady alone, kinder than ever, but often very sad ; and then—

Then the first bright flash in the haze, fixed in a clearness of unchangeable light, against a dark background. The low room, looking out into the garden, with the bunches of red flowers on the carpet, and himself, at five years old, in a black frock. He had been playing with the old soldier-doll that had lost its head, “Napoleon,” and an old lady came in to see him. An old lady ! a female Methuselah, thought Arnout, though in reality Suzanna Varelkamp was then barely five-and-forty ; but, if anything, it seemed to him as if she had grown younger since that dull autumn day when she had first dawned upon his vision, prim, grey, and neat,

in the silence of the house grown desolate. "Your mother is in heaven, Arnout," she had said, by no means unkindly, "and your father is in—— Ah, well! God Almighty and the devil must settle that between them—it's no business of yours or mine, thank the Lord—and you must come away with me. Don't cry!"—this rather nervously; not that he was thinking of crying—"it's babyish to cry. I shall get you a new doll, and you mustn't break its head. Good children never break their toys. I have all my own toys at home, done up in tissue-paper, that I played with when I was a little girl; and you shall see some of them, perhaps, when you are very good indeed." A bold promise, that last one. She made it with some trepidation. She could have given no greater proof of her anxiety to please her little nephew.

"That must have been a *very* long time

ago," said Arnout, with a child's grave stress upon the word. The antiquity of toys had never been so clearly borne in upon his mind. But he hugged Napoleon tightly to his breast. He had no intention of giving up Napoleon.

His aunt laughed. She could always enjoy a joke at her own expense; and cheap every-day vanities were not a part of her nature.

"We shall get on very well, I have no doubt," she said afterwards to the child as they sat in the railway carriage. "You are not accustomed to old ladies, and I am not accustomed to little boys. But we shall manage. You must always be literally obedient, and I shall always be absolutely just."

"Where do the cows sleep at night?" queried little Arnout.

"They lie down on the ground," replied

his aunt shortly. She had hoped that her words would impress him more.

But at this answer Arnout burst out crying—much to the good Juffrouw's dismay. She had seen children cry before, undoubtedly, but she had never had to bear the responsibility of their tears, and, worst of all, had never been required to arrest them. She tried kind inquiry into the cause of his sorrow, and then, finding that unavailing, stern injunction to desist. She felt that she must be gentle, but, above all things, she must be just. Why not tell her what had made him unhappy? The boy shook his tear-begrimed countenance and choked down the sobs. It was the first little tiff between guardian and ward. She feared that he would not be open with her. And, in the very first place, he must be open with her. That was the basis of all intercourse between pedagogue and pupil. Her system——

Arnout pressed his face against the window, and gasped, and gurgled, and clenched his little black-gloved fists. He could not confess to his aunt that the servant-girl had said that his mamma was underground, and that he dreaded that perhaps a great fat cow would lie down on her at night, and that she might not like it. He *could* not tell her that.

“And if your mother, who is in heaven, saw you,” said Suzanna Varelkamp softly, “she would like you to tell me why you are unhappy. And she would like you to respect me, and to—to love me, as a child should those that are set above him, and that are wiser than he is, and willing and able to instruct him.”

That was a compromise with her system, an improvement on her system, and, unconsciously, she obtained her end. The child did not know where heaven was, but

it was recognisedly a pleasant place, and he felt very frightened of cows. There could be no cows in heaven.

He turned round from the carriage-window. With one hand he clutched Napoleon, and with the other he plucked at his aunt's stiff shawl.

"I will love you, Tante Suze," he said. And he did.

But there are many kinds of love, and it is not always easy to hit on the right kind towards a particular person. A good deal of affection is squandered or misapplied in that way, and one often thinks we should be surprised to discover how well we could supply each other's wants, if only we learned to understand them better.

Arnout began by being afraid of his aunt, and anxious to appease her. He seemed to have an idea that, like most heathen deities, her duty was to make things un-

pleasant for all around her, and that, in all estimations of her character, this her unavoidable vocation must be taken into account. His mother's object in life had been to make herself amiable. *That*, emphatically, was not his aunt's. Hers was rather to make herself, and everybody else, better than nature had intended them to be. And, as he grew older, Arnout had sense enough soon to perceive that Suzanna preferred what she thought good to what she thought agreeable. With wide-opened eyes (of the soul) he discovered that her life was a struggle. Marvellous discovery! She did not do what seemed most pleasant, but what she considered she ought to do. And she did not want him to act merely as she thought fitting, but to do what she believed to be right, whether he—or she, for that matter—liked it or no. In spite of slips and inconsistencies, the idea of duty stood out in

the woman's dealings with those around her. It forced itself into Arnout's comprehension and compelled him to respect his aunt's sternness, even when he rebelled against it. If she was stern to him, she was almost sterner to herself.

Not that he liked the sternness. Arnout most unmistakably preferred doing what was pleasant. It was wonderful—it seemed to him—how often the good and the agreeable fall together. Why always strive to separate them? The benevolent and beneficent Power that rules over the affairs of men had arranged that they should combine. Aunt Suzanna was always pulling them apart. Things were right, with her, because they were disagreeable. Women were bad because they were beautiful. Arnout had a weakness for a pretty face. During all the dull tenour of his childhood he had never known his aunt so angry as when she caught

him kissing neighbour's Cornélie behind the hen-coop—neighbour's Cornélie, seven rosy summers to his ten, and lips that could not stop laughing even while they kissed him. If Suzanna had ever been near striking her nephew, it was on that occasion. She dragged him roughly, almost fiercely, to his little room over the porch, and she locked him up with a chapter of Proverbs to learn, of which he did not understand one word. And a good thing too.

“You have more reason than most,” she said severely, “to be afraid of the snares of the evil one. You have a tendency to give way to them. Beware of it in the days of your youth.”

As he grew older he questioned her, half laughingly, half curiously, about his “tendency” to which she so often alluded. Why was he more wicked than most boys? Was he?

“God forbid!” Suzanna’s uncompromising justice compelled her to avow.

“Then why?”

“Silence. You have a tendency. ‘Unto the third and fourth generation.’ And none of us are better than we need be.”

“But my mother was an angel,” persisted the boy.

“Yes, your mother was an angel,” snapped Suzanna smartly, “and you are not.”

Arnout was not satisfied, and he thought within himself that, the stronger was our tendency to unrighteousness, the less could he be blamed for indulging it just a little now and then.

There were points, however, in which he equalled, nay, even distanced, his aunt’s fine distinctions of black and grey. Everything that was mean, or low, or dishonourable, his soul revolted from. “My aunt’s game is little foxes,” he used to say laughingly to

his friend the Dominé. "She has a splendid nose for smaller sins." And therein he wronged her, in so far as he should have added that, if she hunted, it was ever first on her own estate. But Suzanna herself had not her nephew's keen scent of what a gentleman should do or leave undone. Had there not been that battle-royal between them, when Arnout refused to bear witness who had broken the pantry window? "It is your duty," said Suzanna solemnly, "your duty towards God and your superiors to further the ends of justice by all the means in your power."

"It is my duty," said Arnout stubbornly, "to myself and to my brother gentlemen"—this latter very grandly—"not to sneak."

"You are worse than a heathen," cried Suzanna excitedly. "Go up to your room immediately. You shall live on bread and

water for a week." Which he did, much to Suzanna's fiercely crushed misgiving ; but no one ever knew that the culprit was Karel Donselaar.

But, in spite of battles-royal and differences of opinion, aunt and nephew got on far better than any of the village gossips had ventured to predict. Arnout could not but respect his grim relative, and as long as a man respects a woman, their intercourse is all right. And so he endured her severities, because he saw they were never caprices, and, with his far more easy-going nature, he accepted her conscientious conclusions, whenever they agreed with his instincts or his tastes. Fortunately, his instincts were honourable, and his tastes refined. And in many matters appertaining to his manliness, his aunt developed a most unexpected and most unrighteous sympathy. "Don't let a bigger boy hit you," she said ; "strike him

back, and beat him if you can." Arnout was nothing loth to obey. Perhaps Suzanna understood the nature of boys better than she dared to imagine.





CHAPTER III.

IN HIS TEENS.

AND so Arnout Oostrum grew up to be a jolly young fellow, in love with all the world around him, even with his ugly old aunt. A bright young fellow, with a shock of yellow hair and big good-natured eyes, one of those faces that older women smile upon because they look so innocently happy, and that young girls turn away from because they seem so dangerously full of life and fun. Young Arnout Oostrum! People smiled to each other when his name was mentioned, and nodded their heads. "There's no harm in Arnout Oostrum," said the old gentlemen. But to that the old ladies demurred. "There

is always harm," remarked one of them enigmatically, "in a man in whom you can see so much good." And all the girls of the village agreed that he had the "loveliest eyes." But Arnout at eighteen thought little of the girls of the village, though, certainly, if he noticed any of them, they were the pretty ones. He liked his male companions, and such time as the grammar school of the neighbouring town still left at his disposal he spent in rowing with them, and fencing, and flying north and south over the dull green plains of his fatherland, all huddled up and bent double on the top of a two-wheeler. And they made him captain of the school eleven. Start not, athletic reader ; you are still in Holland. The Mynheers have taken to cricket. Well, never mind ; they do their best, and the flannels look picturesque everywhere.

So everybody liked young Arnout Oostrum.

There are qualities which are good in themselves, and qualities which we often think far better because they prove the absence of others the world particularly dislikes. Arnout had a good supply of the former, but he possessed perhaps still more of the latter class. And he had none of that obstreperous virtue which rendered people so afraid of his aunt.

So he yielded to her, and made himself no virtue of so doing. He yielded, because really, you know, it does quite as well after all. *Not* in the important points, mind you. A fellow must keep a clear eye on his honour, when dealing with women. They've no idea of that, poor things, and can't help themselves. But as for the rest, what does it signify?

That was Arnout's creed, and he got on very comfortably with it. He had a sharp tug with the old lady, when he came to

leave the grammar school, and the important decision had to be taken what course of study he should take up at the University. Suzanna had but one idea, one aspiration with regard to this matter. With her own overpowering reverence for the "Dominé" she hoped to see her nephew a minister of the Established Church. And he, if he had owned to any definite opinion on the subject, would probably have said that preaching, on the whole, was preferable to being preached to. No, now he came to think of it, he would rather not be a parson. "But what then?" says Suzanna, pale with suppressed agitation. His life—not a paltry seventy winters—his life, earthly and eternal, the whole immensity of a soul, *his* soul, hung in the balance. She clasped her knitting down tight upon her knees. "Oh, anything, you know," says young Hopeful. "Pill-driver. Ride about in a little carriage. Keep

down surplus population. Or—ah—lawyer. Open prison gates, and that sort of thing. And set the captive free.” And then he threw his arm round his aunt’s neck and kissed her, and wondered (to himself) how her tough old heart could thump like that under the coarse stuff gown.

“I’ve been thinking about it in the night,” he remarked at breakfast next morning, breaking an egg, “and I fancy I should like to study theology. After all, it is, as you often say, aunt, the one engrossing subject in the world. And so it deserves attention. I’ve talked it over with Jakob te Bakel, and, yes, I may as well study theology.”

Thinking about it in the night! Well, if from ten to a quarter-past and from half-past seven to eight be night, then Arnout was not the victim of an erroneous impression. And he had certainly talked about the subject to Jakob te Bakel, the son of a

neighbouring clergyman, a young minister himself now, some half a dozen years Arnout's senior, and much admired by the latter youth. Arnout, by-the-by, was great in admiration. He had said to his friend, "And now you are a parson, Jakob, do you like it?" And Jakob had answered, "Yes," very quietly, and had added to himself in an undertone, "Thank God!" For all the awfulness of a possible "No" had been borne in upon his soul. Arnout had caught the whispered words, and had walked on for several moments in solemn reverential silence, till Jakob spoke of something else.

He did not tell his aunt that he had taken his resolve to please her, because, in the absence of any decided vocation to the contrary, it seemed to him a deed of honour to accord her this one consummate happiness in reward of all the sacrifices she was ever making for his sake.

None the less, he had little idea how great those sacrifices were, or how much anxious thought it cost her to enable him to go to the University at all. Suzanna had spent a sleepless night. Decidedly she took life too "vigorously."

And so at the time when first we came across him, Arnout Oostrum was a theological student at the University of Overstad.





CHAPTER IV.

AND OUT OF THEM.

OUR young gentleman studied theology—at least, so the University calendar said. He himself considered that he was making rapid progress in that knowledge of human nature which forms a whole “man,” a wise man, a man of the world. A careful distinction between good wine and bad, between cheap cigars and expensive ones (especially when told the price), the recognition of a pretty ankle in passing, and, above all, a free-and-easy air—sufficiently dignified and yet sufficiently familiar—towards waiters everywhere. A man of the world. Poor simple young fellows! Every little world has its

own sort of "man." And there is a considerable difference between the cheap polish of a Dutch university town and the heavily gilded article as manufactured in London or Paris. Both, however, have this much in common, that neither is "warranted to last."

A Dutch university is not, alas! an edifying academy to study human nature at. Granted that confusion between "mashing" and manliness which comes upon most hyper-civilised lads with the first bloom of down on their cheeks; granted, moreover, complete immunity in public opinion for not only every folly, but almost every vice, on the ground that the delinquent is "a student," and the result can hardly be considered a satisfactory one. Young Arnout passed through the flames, not unscathed, perhaps, yet barely singed. He did not retain about him, as so many do, the smell of the fire. He was sheltered by his sur-

roundings, his companions, his "set ;" for at his university and in his time the theological students, on the whole, with a few loudly trumpeted exceptions, shone forth as rare stars on a stormy night. His character steadied and took definite shape, as a man's character should do at this period of his life. Vicious it was almost impossible for him to become—his tastes recoiled too instinctively from what was low and common,—but he could no longer keep his eyes from looking vice in the face as they never had done before. And that look leaves its impress on a man's inmost soul, even when he turns away. Superficial as he sometimes seemed, perhaps, and easy-going, our hero had a passion of admiration somewhere in his heart that, once awakened, could not be got to sleep again. That in itself was superficial, perhaps, or unbalanced, or call it what you will, if you care for mental dissection, for nobody quite

knew beforehand what would set "the tremble in his heart" a-going. God bless the young fellows of the nineteenth century that still have strength of mind enough for genuine admiration! Arnout Oostrum could "get along" with everybody, except with those unfortunate creatures, often harmless enough in his aunt's estimation, whom he designated as "beastly cads," and turned away from at once. But liking you—oh, that was another matter, very akin to loving, only that we men of the world hate the sound of the mawkish word; if you liked a man or woman it was for something good or great in them that you missed and fain would have. Well, well, he was only twenty. And he loved his aunt, and Jakob, and Schiller, and Alfred de Musset, and Dorothy up at Steenevest, who was to be his wife some day, as every one agreed, as soon as he chose to give her the opportunity of

saying "Yes." And he loved his violin, which he played but indifferently, and life, and the golden summer time, when the air was heavy with enjoyment. In love with the world around him, in a word, and with himself as its centre-point.

And so he went down the dusty road in the soft, sweet-smelling gloaming, with the drowsy old tune on his lips, and his heart full of the new-mown hay and the jasmine. And he stopped, where the heavy bushes burst forward over the path with their luxuriance of a thousand creamy stars, and broke off one or two of them, half regretfully for the life he was destroying. And then he sprang back upon the roadway with a bound full of youth and health and happiness.

And so he turned the corner of his fate.



CHAPTER V.

KNIGHT-ERRANT.

A CONVEYANCE of some kind or other, evidently a shabby concern, was standing in the middle of the road at a considerable distance from the turning Arnout had just taken. Was it standing or lying? It looked all the more disreputable from its having sunk awry with so dead-drunk an appearance as only a human being or an old vehicle can assume. Something was wrong, evidently. Arnout ran forward, shading his eyes with the hand that held the jasmine blossoms, as the shadows fell heavy between him and the group over yonder by the break in the trees. Something was wrong, most

certainly. The horse had been taken out. It stood apart, a peasant holding it. One or two other passers-by—all the “traffic” which the lonely road could boast at such an hour—had also stopped. Somebody was sitting by the roadside, the former occupant of the carriage, doubtless—a female, by Jove! Arnout's heart went pit-a-pat, with running and curiosity. He stopped, breathless, a few paces from the little tragi-comedy in front of him.

The long white road lay warm and still beneath the deepening shadows. Two men and a boy, who stood staring stolidly at the broken axle, smashed in two just under the box, drew slow hands out of deep pockets and lazily touched their caps to the newcomer. The horse, limp and woe-begone like the vehicle, gazed calmly at this source of unexpected rest, motionless, were it not for an occasional wink of its weary eye.

Arnout, however, saw little of all this. He was striving—'twixt timidity and temerity—to get a glimpse of the lady's face, not an easy thing as long as she lay up against the tall beech tree and turned her back towards him. A slender arm was holding a handkerchief over the eyes; the figure and pose were graceful; the dress, some soft black with a sparkle here and there, was in perfect taste. Doubtless the face would be beautiful too.

He coughed—a stupid little cough; and then blushed at the clumsy expedient.

The lady by the tree turned her head at the sound.

It was the most beautiful face he had seen in his life.

Well, yes, I believe she was a handsome woman, especially at that age. Certainly she was handsome. And even had she not been as handsome as she was, what else

could Arnout have thought of her, when he found her thus by the roadside? Shall carriages upset on lovely summer evenings, and shall young twenty come a-down the road and not be upset in his turn by the sight of beautiful distress? Fie upon young twenty if so it be! Let him never smell the smell of jasmine again.

“*Mon Dieu!*” said the lady—and what else should a Frenchwoman say? “*Un homme comme il faut! Quelle chance! Avow, monsieur, that you come à propos!*”

The recognition of his claim to that most charming of all appellations pleased Arnout so hugely that he felt at his ease at once. But, alas! he knew that his French was rusty, and he bitterly regretted lost opportunities as he stammered out his reply—

If he could be of any use in any possible manner! If there was anything that madame would desire to have done! If she would

but give expression to her wishes— But the lady interrupted him sharply, though with the sweetest of smiles—

“Si—si—si,” she said. “But without doubt, monsieur, there are a hundred things at least you can do for me. You can settle with the bonhomme over there, and you can procure me another conveyance, and you can help me into it, and, if you are a doctor, you can cure me, for I have broken my foot.”

“Broken her foot!” Arnout’s face showed the deep commiseration which his powers of language—especially of foreign language—were quite inadequate to express. Some idiotic conception of a compliment about breaking any number of hearts, millions—myriads—floated across his brain, but he fortunately did not feel capable of expressing it elegantly, so he merely said instead—

“Does it hurt?”

“If it hurts?” repeated the Frenchwoman,

still smiling. "I am suffering agonies. What will you have? They must be borne."

Her face was white with pain, and she set her lips hard between the smiles. She drew her dress up slightly, thereby just showing enough of the lovely injured member, and then fell back again with a gasp. "I cannot move myself," she said faintly. "The—the bag. In the carriage! There is eau-de-cologne."

Arnout, who had been standing like a booby, fiddling at his jasmine twigs, woke up immediately at this sign of positive suffering. He was inside the old caleche in a moment. He had found the most exquisite of dressing-bags—or so it seemed to the simple country lad—a marvel of soft leather and sweet violet. He had selected from half a dozen silver flasks—what an age lost in the seeking!—the one he was in search of. He had caught up a couple of handkerchiefs from the bag—

soft and small, they seemed to him like puffs of dandelion seed—and he was back by the side of the lovely creature on the grass. The boors stood staring open-mouthed.

Then our hero drew a small pair of scissors from his pocket and cut away the first Paris-made boot he had ever seen in his life from the first Parisian foot. His heart trembled, but not his hand, as a deep-drawn sob of mingled pain and relief broke from the sufferer. He went back to the carriage and got one of its faded cushions, which looked more sordid than ever under that Cinderella foot. What a cushion for such a jewel!

“If I had only a little brandy!” he said.

“You will find some in the carriage,” whispered the patient. “The little bottle under the *livre d’heures*. It is the littlest bottle of all, you will understand, *monsieur*, that is the brandy-flask.” She smiled again, as she painfully gasped out the words, smiled

at the feeling in her own heart which prompted those words to the lad.

And Arnout, having done all he could for the moment, retired to consult with the driver. From him he learned the cause of the accident, not that he had doubted it from the first. There is no road in Holland so narrow, no village-street so frequented, but it can have its steam-tramways crashing along it. The worse for you, if your horses object to the sight or the sound, or if there is no room for them to swerve aside between the rails and the ditch. Arnout Varelkamp understood all about the sudden wrench and the broken axle. The lady, who had started from her seat, had lost her balance and fallen out on the road. She was driving back to Overstad. One of the men could go to the village for another carriage. They would probably have a conveyance there of some sort. He could be back with it in an hour, or

may be in an hour and a half. There would be no more trams passing till half-past nine. Mynheer saw that it was getting dark.

Yes, yes ; Arnout knew all that. He looked at his watch. Ten minutes to eight. Could the delicate woman on the grass be left lying there for another hour ? And supposing she could, how could she bear the long drive to the city, or even to the wretched inn at the village ? He stood there undecided. He looked at the driver in despair—at the harmless, useless peasants in disgust. Why could they not find a sensible solution of the difficulty ? Why need they stare unmeaningly at his every movement ? Fools !

The driver was depressed by his own misfortune. Selfish brute !

But what would his aunt say ? He grew hot and cold at the thought. Well, there was no help for it.

“Madame,” he began resolutely, advancing again to the stranger, who was now half unconscious between the increasing gloom around her and the pain of her foot. “We shall have to carry you as best we can to the nearest house. I regret deeply. There is no other way. Can you bear it?”

“Faites, monsieur,” she murmured. “Mais faites vite.”

How much money had he in his pocket? More than he could spare. Not enough, perhaps, to pay for the carriage, and he would fain have paid for the damage also. He had seen a purse in the dressing-bag; his cheek glowed at the idea of touching it. He went over to the cabman and gave him the address of his university rooms. His aunt must not know.

Then he summoned the two peasants, and they moved slowly forward, all in a lump. And the little boy lifted up his voice and said, “I’ll carry something.”

It was not an easy matter to move the stranger, who was tall and svelte. Very tenderly and very carefully Arnout got her in his arms. He had hoped to carry her, with one of the countrymen, on their crossed hands, but he soon saw that her foot was too painful to allow of this. So he caught her up boldly, and, with his blood tingling with the effort and all his sinews crisped, strode manfully down the road, calling to the boy to follow with the bag and the wraps from the carriage. And she, despite the agony she was enduring, could yield herself with a dull pleasure to the gentle strength upholding her. All the first foolish admiration had sunk to calm in the young fellow's breast, lulled by the overwhelming impulse of pity for suffering and the firm resolve to alleviate it by every means in his power.



CHAPTER VI.

ON HOSPITABLE THOUGHTS INTENT.

MEJUFFROUW VARELKAMP and the Dominé, discussing the poor of the parish over their tea in the verandah, saw this strange little procession emerge out of the twilight. Stumbling rapidly though awkwardly forward, for the weight about his neck had grown almost intolerably heavy, Arnout came up the short garden-path. The little boy ran after him, and banged the wooden gate. Before Suzanna had had time to realize her own amazement, she must face the difficulty and act. Arnout fell past her towards the sofa in the little sitting-room beyond the verandah, and there deposited

his burden with a groan of relief. It might have been almost an omen that he thus bent beneath that burden so lightly taken to his breast. The lady herself opened her eyes. The room was almost dark, but she could discern the female figure in the open window.

“De grâce,” she said, “your son is a paragon; and you, madame, I have the conviction, are a refuge of the distressed.” And then she fainted away for good and all.

“No, thank you, Arnout,” said Suzanna, as soon as the Frenchwoman was deposited on the bed in the spare-room. “I am quite sure we do not want you any longer. You have done quite enough, I am sure.”

“But, tante, I wanted to see if the boot——”

“Thank you. I shall see without your

help. I believe I am still able to manage a sprained ankle."

"A broken foot!" cried Arnout indignantly.

"We shall soon know that. Most broken feet turn out to be sprained ankles. Go down and pour Jakob out another cup of tea."

"He will do that for himself, but you may—want something I could get."

"I want my temper," said Suzanna spitefully. "Go downstairs and see if I have left it there."

When his aunt got into the satirical stage Arnout always obeyed her. He knew that it was the ante-chamber to the highly indignant one, so he withdrew, with a last look at the invalid, and Suzanna set herself to examine the mischief done.

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp did not like foreigners. She considered them superfluities. She loved them, of course, in a

general sense, like all her neighbours and her enemies, as by Scripture bound, but she loved them from a distance. She saw no necessity for their existence, though the Almighty had willed it otherwise, and it seemed to her that whenever she heard of their doings, which was seldom, they were doing something wrong. She read the *Provincial Gazette* every evening from nine till half-past, immediately after washing up her tea-cups, but the only impression made upon her by its brief column of foreign intelligence (of which she forgot the contents even while she read them) was this—that the world would be peaceful without the French and the Russians, and honest without the Germans and the English; and that, moreover, the far places of the earth were full of wickedness, murders and robberies and treacheries unknown in the good village of Wyk. Mejuffrouw Varelkamp considered it

a special dispensation of Providence on her behalf that she had not been born a foreigner.

And Mejuffrouw Varelkamp did not like beauties, whether of home manufacture or imported from abroad. For these also she saw no necessity, and of these also was she convinced that they did more harm than good. She would have laughed at the accusation, but it was true nevertheless. Perhaps she would have admitted, after a moment, that there was some truth in it. She would have pointed—figuratively—to Cleopatra's nose, for Pascal's saying that the face of the world's history would have been changed, had Cleopatra's nose been a little different to what it was, had long been a favourite with Suzanna. Not that she read Pascal, but the quotation had tickled her fancy, and stuck in her memory. She had half a dozen such quotations, gathered promiscuously, and therefore ready to hand.

“Chaque âme est sœur d’une âme,” was another. And she used to say, with a grim smile, that her sister-soul must have “died still-born.”

Well, and this saying about Cleopatra’s nose? Wasn’t it true, if you come to think of it? She wasn’t a beauty, thank Heaven! And she had never pretended to be, like so many other young women. Not but that a girl might be glad of her good looks; but beauty as an article of commerce, a speculation, a bait——

No, decidedly, Suzanna preferred plain features, especially in the close vicinity of her foster-child.

And Mejuffrouw Varelkamp did not like strangers, even when they were of her own race and nation. She liked to know all about you, and your father and mother, and your great-uncles and great-aunts. She was strong in genealogies, and the people with

whose genealogy she was not acquainted might be very good people, doubtless, but there was no reason why she should trouble her head about them. "And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber, and unto Eber were born two sons." That was her social religion. Holland is a small country, and it is not difficult to be a zealous devotee. On the contrary, it would have been very difficult indeed for Eber to beget two sons without Miss Varelkamp knowing all about the circumstance, and when they were born, and whose nurse they had, and what the doctor said. If nobody could tell you who had begotten Barabbas, that only proved to Miss Varelkamp that there was no excuse for his being begotten at all. Had she belonged to the "upper ten thousand"—let us say "upper two thousand" for little Dutchdom—her knowledge would have extended all over the country; as it

was, it confined itself to her own highly respectable provincial circle, outside which was darkness and the chaos of the unknown.

"I was thinking," said Arnout's voice in a low, distinct whisper behind the door, "that I had perhaps better get the doctor, Tante Suze."

At first she vouchsafed no answer but a scornful sniff. Then suddenly it struck her that he might take her silence for consent, and she threw open the door.

Arnout stood on the narrow landing, under the light of a flickering oil-lamp. His face was troubled, and his whole attitude denoted anxiety.

"Yes," said his aunt; "go immediately for four professors from Utrecht. One can fill the shower-bath, and one can pull the string, and the other two can hold you under it. Good night, Arnout." And she flung to the door and locked it triumphantly.

Had any one told Suzanna Varelkamp that morning that a stranger, a foreigner, a woman—of whom she knew neither the country, the origin, nor the name—would pass a night under her roof, in her guest-chamber, she would have said that never, never would she permit such a thing. Such stranger, if alive, would be removed to the village inn or the parsonage, and if she died on the way—well, there was a dead-house at the cemetery.

She busied herself now with the sufferer, who revived after a few moments from her faint. Suzanna was an excellent nurse—none better—light-fingered and strong-nerved. She ascertained soon enough that the injury to the foot was a sprain of some importance, and she got arnica from her room close by, with a smile of satisfaction at the disappearance of Arnout from the staircase, and deftly bandaged the swollen part. Then, seeing

that the patient was weak with the pain and excitement, and still almost unconscious, she lighted the little oil night-light from her own room, with its cracked shade of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and stole out of the chamber and locked the door on the outside.





CHAPTER VII.

PARSON JAKOB.

“THERE is no more tea,” said Jakob, in a melancholy voice—“at least, none worth drinking. You will have to do without, Arnout, for your aunt has sent away the peat-stove.”

Arnout was in a hilarious mood. The events of the evening had excited him. He burst out into joyous laughter. “You tea-pot!” he cried; “your one idea of happiness is to be brimful and running over with the exhilarating fluid. How many cups have you had this evening already? You are an old woman, Jakob. I believe you think

heaven will be one eternal tea-fight. It is your religion."

"Tea-ism, in fact," said the clergyman, with his quiet twinkle—he had the clearest of grey eyes. "Don't try to be funny, Arnout. I don't think you can manage even as easy a thing as the religious joke. If I have contracted the pernicious habit of tea-imbibing, it is as a martyr in a righteous cause. It is one of a clergyman's principal duties to take tea. In the religious world of to-day the tea-cup plays the part which the bottle played in the political world a hundred years ago. If, therefore, I appreciate the tea-cup——"

"Oh, bother!" interrupted Arnout. "Not a bad bit of anatomy, eh?"

"Who? What?" said Jakob.

"Jakob, you are insufferable. Of course you didn't see her as I carried her upstairs. The reverend! The cleric——!"

“Arnout, did I not warn you against attempting to be funny? I certainly saw the lady you carried in here, and I thought she looked very ill, and also handsome. But I’m not accustomed, nor are you, to expressing that latter fact in the phraseology of the connoisseur, and—— Don’t get angry. I’ve only put one foot on the pulpit step, and I’ll take it off again as soon as you promise to behave yourself. There, there! Tell me how it happened. I’m as curious to know as you can be to tell.”

So Arnout described the events of the evening, unnecessarily deploring, with that painful self-consciousness of youthful vanity which ever either blames itself or boasts, that he had omitted opportunities of shining in the strange lady’s opinion. Jakob sympathised with him, and laughed at him, and reproached him for his conceit, as was ever this good-natured mentor’s way. At the

bottom of his heart the minister admired his young companion profoundly, but he was resolved to retain that admiration as long as he could—so he said. He said it to Arnout, turning off the earnestness of his meaning by the flippancy of his expression—that also was his wont. The good ladies of the village sometimes complained to each other that their minister was a would-be funny man—a most objectionable thing in a minister. “He is not in earnest, my dear. You cannot be ‘funny’ and in earnest.” He was so terribly in earnest, and so young and beardless, he could not but shrink from the intensity of his own convictions, and often, when his heart trembled with its earnestness, his lips would quiver to a grin. He was striving at this moment, with true anxiety, to account for his friend’s unnatural tone. “Exit the monster, shrieking and snorting! Enter Knight Arnout, the deliverer!” he said.

But the young student's mood had sobered down. The sudden incident on the quiet country road, trivial as it may seem to the supercilious reader, had been an event full of interest and excitement to the unsophisticated lad who had "seen life" only as it is lived in Overstad. A carriage accident! A foreign lady in distress! The shades of night, and a Frenchwoman in his arms all the way home through the scents of summer! What more would you have to turn his head? Yet his head was not turned; a Dutchman's all-round head takes a deal of turning. He had recognised the stranger's beauty as a fact, a very interesting and admirable fact, no doubt, but he had noticed it as we flush with pleasure at the sight of a beautiful vase. The romance of the meeting stimulated him, and he would have liked to have fallen in love with the "rescued" fair one headlong and at first sight, as knowing that this was

the proper thing to do. It would have put the finishing touch to the evening's adventure. But the more he realised this, and the more he tried to excite himself into it, the more he felt that his head was getting lamentably cool. Perhaps, had she been well and sprightly, armed for the conquest and eager to conquer—perhaps ; but now the feeling of commiseration and the eagerness to bestow succour had swelled upwards and swamped every other consideration, and Arnout was only hoping with warm-hearted kindness that the stranger had not much pain and would soon get well again. He hoped this, heart and soul, and he was conscious of a very passion of anxiety that the little house should do all it could—and more, if necessary—to afford her relief.

“ Poor thing ! ” he said, and there was such a genial pity in his tone, that Jakob felt reassured, for men do not pity when they love.

Love ! Nonsense ! Nothing could prove more plainly how unused we were to romance, or anything like romance, in the quiet little village of Wyk. The merest event at all out of the common immediately gave rise to the wildest speculation, even in the tranquil heart of the parson. No wonder that Suzanna's soul was troubled within her as she slowly descended the stairs. No wonder that even Arnout's careless manner failed to reassure her. But she need hardly have sat up in her bed for half the night, with her thoughts intent on the forks and spoons, speculating whether the Frenchwoman, whose distorted ankle she herself had tended, was at this moment drawing them out of their hiding-place, or whether that creak in the passage——

Well, well, we are none of us consistent in our passions. Great Heaven, what an awful place would this world be, if we were !



CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST APPEARANCE OF TANTE CRÆSUS.

NEXT morning the Widow Barsselius came to see the stranger and hear all about it. And she brought Dorothy with her, for Dorothy had begged to come.

The Widow Barsselius occupied one of the most delightful positions in the world. She was the only wealthy member of her family. Wealthy! Well, you know, most things go by comparison, and few are so distinctly relative as the idea of wealth. Mevrouw Barsselius lived in a substantial old house on one of the silent Overstad canals, a house with two windows on each side of the "stoep." She kept two maidservants, and

a man for the knives and errands. And she could have a fly from the stables as often as she chose. Arnout Oostrum called her "Tante Cræsus."

She always knew everything about the cottage at Wyk, though Wyk is a two hours' drive from the town. She knew things as soon as they happened—sometimes a little sooner. And in the latter case she had "always foreseen." The life of the good Widow Barsselius was spent in an engrossing and almost feverish interest in those matters which in nowise concerned her.

So Suzanna, careful not to offend, had despatched a hurried note with last night's post, and the widow, having found it on her breakfast-table, had sent her errand-man round to the livery-stables instanter, and had enjoyed an hour of pleasurable flurry before she was stowed away in the close cab with Dorothy, a pair of shawls, her fat Maltese

“Bijou,” and a large bouquet of roses. Mevrouw Barsselius always brought her sister roses from her garden, to prove that you could grow these things in the city far better than among the fields.

Dorothy was staying with Mevrouw. Her curiosity must have been considerable to cause her to court that two hours' drive on so lovely a summer morning. In any case, she was glad enough when it came to an end at last. “Mark my words,” said the Widow Barsselius, as they stopped at the little garden gate. She said it for the twentieth time that morning, and for the millionth in her unremarkable existence. “Mark my words. It is the cheval de Troie which my sister has fetched into her house.” She spelt it “cheval de Troyes,” and believed that the expression contained an allusion to some event of French history, she had not the remotest idea which.

But you need not go thinking, all the same, that the Widow Barsselius was a fool. She was as ignorant—and as 'cute—as a perfect education left the women of thirty years ago. We have changed all that; and the ignorance—and the 'cuteness—are gone.

“Drive on to the village,” she said, standing — a portly figure — with Bijou in one hand, and the roses in the other, “and be back by three exactly. You can have some bread-and-cheese at the inn, *and* coffee; but no beer, and no gin. I'm not going to be dropped into the canal on my way home, to please anybody's drunken habits. You are a drunkard, probably, and I pity your wife and fourteen children. I would give you 'Jan Janssen's Ruin' if I thought it would do you any good. But you look past help.”

The man grinned, and touched his hat. He had heard this little speech before. It was true that he drank. As for the fourteen

children, Mevrouw Barsselius knew nothing about them. It was an ancient joke with her, which had long ago deepened into an article of belief, that every drunkard had an enormous family. And she would have considered the number "twelve" an indecency, because of its allusion to the patriarchs.

"Suzanna," she said, as she proceeded up the narrow path, "I have brought you some roses. They have suffered a good deal on the way, but I thought you might care to see what my roses are like."

Mevrouw Barsselius was stout and warm. She did not mind the former, and she enjoyed the latter. She lived in continual terror of an imaginary draught.

"And where," she asked, "is your French-woman? Shut the door, Arnout, and leave Bijou alone."

"Upstairs in her room——" began Arnout.

"In my guest-chamber," interrupted Miss

Varelkamp tartly ; “ where she is likely to remain for the next six weeks.”

Mevrouw Barsselius cast an amused look at her elder sister out of her canny little eyes. The exasperation of Suzanna's tone delighted her. And she pitied the poor old lady a little as well. But she enjoyed teasing above all things in the world—except scandal:

“ Tell me all about it, Arnout,” she said, as she settled herself comfortably in her own especial easy-chair. She had given it to Suzanna for that very purpose fourteen years ago. “ Begin at the beginning, and tell me exactly what you said and what she said, and what you did and what she did. Of course I know that you now think you should have said and done differently. Never mind. Tell me all about it. A Frenchwoman upset between Heelsum and Wyk ! It is delightful ! ”

So Arnout, very red in the face and furious at his own foolish embarrassment, had to tell the whole stupid story over again, with Dorothy's grave eyes fixed tranquilly on his. How tiresome these old women were, and how small the room looked ! Good heavens ! was it possible that so simple an occurrence could be construed into an event of gossipy interest ?

"And then," he went on savagely, "I took her up in my arms as tenderly as I could——"

Suzanna, as if hearing of the fact for the first time, gave an involuntary start.

"Don't interrupt, Suze," cried Mevrouw Barsselius ; clutching her sleepy lapdog, her face beaming with enjoyment. "Let the boy alone. 'And so I took her up,' Arnout, 'with a touch of ineffable tenderness.' Go on."

Arnout would have liked to lay hold of

his aunt with a touch that was far from tender. "How vulgar she is," he thought, and he stole a glance at Dorothy. Dorothy was looking calmly at him. She said nothing, but there was an amused twinkle in her eyes. Wretch!

All the same, he felt that he was very fond of Dorothy, and he wished they would not make a fool of him in her presence.

"The entr'acte," remarked his aunt Barselius enigmatically, when he had told all she cared to extract from him. "I reserve my seat for the rest of the performance. And now, show me the heroine!"

"Madame de Mongelas is upstairs, Anne-marie," said Suze severely. "I have told you so before. I have consented to her remaining in the house as long as she is confined to her—couch. As soon as she is able to be moved, she will be carried to the hotel in the village."

"I see," said Mevrouw Barsselius. "What did you say her name was?"

Arnout took up a card from the little side-table, where the town roses were doing their best to revive by the aid of a tumblerful of water and a thimbleful of country air, Mevrouw Barsselius having ordered the windows to be closed. It was a tiny card, neat and unpretending. He held it towards his aunt. "Vicomtesse de Mongelas."

"Phew!" said the fat lady, with a most unmistakable whistle. "Vicomtesse! The princess out of the fairy tale! Dorothy must see her immediately. Fetch her down."

"Annemarie, I have told you already——"

Somebody knocked at the door at this juncture. They all started, and Mevrouw gave a little scream. It was as if the mysterious stranger stood at the door—the interesting, the alarming stranger. And the simple souls were fluttered by the thought.

It was only Jakob te Bakel, come to inquire after the patient.

Mevrouw Barsselius did not like parsons as a rule, and pious parsons least of all.

“Oho, Dominé!” she cried with a sounding slap of her fat hand on her favourite’s silken back, “you here already to make kind inquiries! No need to demand now if the lady is good-looking. Trust you saints to find out the prettiest sinners. But, mind you, the little papist is no sheep of your fold. Hands off, till we send for the village priest.”

“Do you really believe, sister,” said Suzanna in an awestruck tone, “that the person upstairs will prove to be an idolatrous child of Rome?”

Mevrouw Barsselius burst out laughing, and Dorothy remarked sententiously, that all French people were Roman Catholics.

“Except the Huguenot pastors who come here to collect,” said Jakob, as he limped to

a chair. "We get about a couple of score per annum, and I suppose they collect for somebody."

"Hold your tongues," cried the rich widow, with another slap. "Let's have no more talking, but show us the original."

"She can't come downstairs," said Suzanna decidedly. "In fact she can't move, and as you, Annemarie, have never mounted a staircase for the last seven years, at the very least, you will have to go back without seeing her to-day, that's certain."

Suzanna did not often contradict her younger sister so flatly. She was a little bit afraid of her as a rule, or rather, she could never quite shake off the imposing impression which Annemarie had made upon her ever since they were children together. Annemarie had been the favourite with their parents—and with everybody; had been the prettier, brighter, pleasanter child. And

Suzanna had always been taught to consider Annemarie's comfort and to obey her behests. Of course Annemarie had made a "desirable" settlement—she was born to do so; and ever since, all through her velvety childless wife- and widowhood, the thinner, sourer sister's admiration had only found fresh abundance to feed upon. At times a doubt of Annemarie's superiority would cross her mind, but she always suppressed it as a sin. Besides, was not the widow affluent, amiable, good-tempered? Suzanna did not covet her riches, but she could not help experiencing their charm. To her whole existence of hand-to-mouth struggle, of daily renunciation, it was a wonderful, a beautiful thing to be able to do, pecuniarily, whatever one liked. It was a force which it were wrong, as well as foolish, to ignore. There was nothing mean or money-loving in the awe with which she spoke of her sister's unlimited power of

ordering cabs, as she trudged to the village church in the rain. But the money, whatever hold it might have on her imagination, left her moral sense untouched. And whenever that came into conflict with Annemarie's opinions—which was frequently—*and* she felt certain, into the bargain, that Annemarie was wrong—which was by no means so commonly—she stood up and said her say to her sister without fear and without reproach.

“You won't see the Frenchwoman to-day,” she repeated, “unless you go up and have a look at her in her room.”

Now the Widow Barsselius had just the faintest touch of asthma, a pleasant weakness, for it absolutely precluded her from mounting more than six steps at a time—six steps, just the number of her own “stoep”; that was a very considerate arrangement of the powers that ruled her destiny! Therefore

she was very gentle to her ailment, and nurtured it tenderly.

She slapped her hand down so violently at this stage of the proceedings, that the little wretch beneath it set up a yell of protest. Upon which she caught him to her ample bosom and covered him with kisses, angrily ordering Dorothy not to laugh.

"Do you think," she cried, "that I have come all the way from Overstad and paid six florins and the turnpikes and the man's food and fifty cents pour-boire, and that I'm going to have nothing in return for all my expenditure? The same way the woman went up she can come down. And I don't leave this house till I've found out all about her, and whether she's a fit person to be left alone with a pack of children like you!"

She was burning with curiosity to see a live viscountess. And it was her invariable habit to treat her elder sister like a poor,

ignorant infant, and her nephew like an overgrown boy. "Suzanna," she would remark to her cronies, "has no knowledge of the world's realities. She has not sense enough to be anything except an old maid. And she is the dearest old maid in existence."

"And now," she said to Arnout, "if the woman is lying on her couch, as your aunt Suzanna tells us, go upstairs and fetch her down this moment, in the same way as you carried her up."





CHAPTER IX.

WHO COOKS A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH.

“HE shall not do it,” said Suzanna, before Arnout could make up his mind. “Sister, where is your sense of delicacy? I am ashamed of you. Are these city manners?”

The last words, an echo of many former combats, were unnecessary and unwise.

“City manners!” echoed Mevrouw, bristling up and unseating Bijou altogether; “and what else do you think the lady upstairs—always supposing her to be a lady—has been accustomed to? Do you think she has been asleep in a village all her life, with a lot of Dutch boors? She will be glad

enough to meet a reasonable woman, and I insist upon her being given the chance!"

This tone always silenced Suzanna effectually, but it silenced her with the resolve to hold out. Men speak of the dangers of attack from a woman's tongue. They are great, undoubtedly. But it is not till she retreats within the stronghold of her dumbness that her power becomes terrible indeed. And Suzanna was a match for her sister Barsselius.

"I forbid Arnout to go," she said quietly.

"Oh, of course," cried the widow, "and send for the youngker's nurse, and scold her for forgetting to put the cotton wool in his ears! And don't let the dear child go out walking, for fear it should see the cows."

"Annemarie, you are indecent," cried Suzanna—a pale flush over her pinched face. "I am sure that every person of feeling would agree with me."

"The Dominé does!" interrupted the widow. "Don't you, Dominé? You clergy have the secret of the improper! You cultivate its different shades, like a gardener his roses. Explain about it to Dorothy, do!"

"Thank you, Mevrouw," cried Dorothy with some spirit. "I am quite able to distinguish for myself."

"Hoity-toity! In my time girls were not so eager to own to their knowledge of both sides of the question. Then you, Mejuffer, have the good sense to bid dear Arnout obey me, in your own interest, as well as in his."

"I certainly consider," remarked Jakob gravely, "if my opinion be asked, that this conversation is both unseemly and unprofitable. Miss Suzanna's invalid guest has a double claim to the first privilege of hospitality—repose."

"But your opinion is not asked, right reverend sir," cries the Widow Barsselius with

the in consequence of anger, "nor do I care for it or for anybody else's. I have an opinion of my own, thank Heaven, and power to enforce it. And Arnout, who is dying for another meeting with the charmer, goes upstairs to her this moment in spite of Miss Varelkamp's anxiety to spoil the sport."

Suzanna placed herself in front of the door. "He shall not go," she said. "He shall not take that woman in his arms again—unnecessarily—with me *and* Dorothy to look on."

"And I say he shall," stamped the widow, "or I don't come to this house again in a twelvemonth, and I alter my will to-night. Mind that, Arnout—and you, Dorothy!"

All this storm in a tea-cup had raged round young Oostrum, standing white and silent, with a rising fury in his breast. What were these women—ay, what even was his aunt Suzanna?—to discuss his young heart between

them and to analyse its rights and wrongs? What was Jakob to "give his opinion" on so sacred a subject! Oh, the shame of it, the indecency, the insult—with that innocent girl standing by! He recoiled equally from the one old woman's purity—prudity—and from the other old woman's vulgar innuendos. And why should he not, if so he chose, or if so it were convenient, take any human creature in his arms and carry her to the end of the world? And how should one woman dare to grin, if he did so, or the other dare, worse still, to blush? His soul was very wroth within him, not so much for his own sake, perhaps, as for Dorothy's. He felt as if the girl were being struck in his presence, and his rash young spirit sprang forward to defend her.

"I can judge for myself what is fitting," he said hotly; "nor is there anything proper or improper in the whole matter, Aunt Anne-

marie. If the lady asks me to help her downstairs, I can do so, but I shall certainly wait till she asks."

"Child," replied the widow with a grin, "don't be impertinent—at least, not to me. Your aunt Suzanna must look out for herself; but for your own sake and Dorothy's you must be amiable to me."

"And I refuse," continued Arnout still more hotly, "to allow you to couple Miss van Donselaar's name in this manner with mine. What business have you to drag her into the discussion at all? What business have you to assume that she is interested in my future, or that she asks for a share in your money! Keep your money, and, when you are dead——"

"Arnout!" cried Suzanna, not without a certain glow of satisfaction.

"Hold your tongue and let the boy speak," flared up the widow. "He is as angry with

you as with me, I can tell you, Suze. Well, insolence, what next ? ”

Arnold had started up and was pacing the room with rapid strides. He stopped—at as great a distance from them all as the limited space would allow. “ I have no intention of being rude to anybody,” he said deliberately, “ but I cannot help considering such conversation as that of this morning an insult to Miss van Donselaar. Never mind the Frenchwoman, but you have no right, Aunt Annemarie, to suppose any connection between me and any young lady, least of all in that young lady’s presence. You have done so repeatedly lately ; you have done so again to-day. And you place me under the painful obligation—— ”

“ You are making speeches, Arnold,” interrupted the fat widow hastily, “ and they are rather tiresome. Leave off, and fetch the pretty papist down.”

“I am not making a speech,” said Arnout, still quietly. “And at any rate, this is the peroration. Miss Donselaar—” and then there came a faint tremble into his voice—“I am going to ask you to be my wife. I don’t expect you,” he went on hurriedly, “to answer me. I know I have as yet no right to speak to you on the subject.” At this juncture Bijou got mixed up between the young fellow’s legs. He kicked the dog fiercely aside, and as that injured animal fled howling to its mistress, he poured forth his words with the greater rapidity. A bell rang upstairs ; but nobody heeded that.

“Hush ! Don’t say anything. Let me speak. You will give me the answer when you think fit, or—or—your father. Only you hear that I have asked you, and you hear, Tante Suze, and you, Tante Annemarie. And you, Jakob, you hear also, mind you, after listening to my aunt all the morning.

And now, if afterwards, when I am ready and old enough to support you, we do not marry, Aunt Barsselius will know, and Jakob will know, and everybody, that it was not I who refused the match, but Miss—but you, Dorothy. I have done my speech, thank you, Aunt Barsselius, and I'm awfully sorry you obliged me to make it—Good heavens! I don't mean that," continued the young fellow in great distress. "I mean, Dorothy, I'm so sorry you had to listen to it just now. And I'm quite sure I love you, and so I have a right to ask you, only I never should have done it if it hadn't been for my aunts, and Jakob."

Once more the upstairs bell pealed through the silence of the little house.

"Thank you, Nout," said Dorothy, almost inaudibly. But he caught the words, and the familiar abbreviation—the pet name, suddenly drawn up out of the oblivion of

their childhood—told him more than her downcast eyes had dared express. That is to say, it told him that she was grateful to him for his delicacy of feeling, and that she understood his motive and appreciated it. And he wondered whether, some day perhaps, she would accept him. And he thought how sweet and good she looked with that bar of light from the half-closed sun-blinds across her braided hair.

Then nobody spoke for a moment. And then the young minister rose up in his corner and limped forward towards his friend and silently shook his hand.

“All this is very pretty and very romantic,” said the rich widow’s shrill cackle, “and we shall see what Dorothea’s father says. And you remind me of Don Quixote, Arnout, and I dare say I should not have objected. But you deliberately kicked Bijou, which shows you are a far greater brute than

you imagine. And that I shall never forgive you! Mark my words. I shall never forgive you that. Now, bring down the Frenchwoman. That was an interesting little scene; but it has lasted quite long enough. And what does Dorothea intend to answer?"

"Miss Donselaar," burst in Arnout, "will not answer anything till she thinks fit to do so. In no case will she answer to-day."

"Tush!" cried the old woman, veering round with the rapidity of obstinacy. "Come, Dolly, the boy is not a bad boy, though he shall never have a penny from me; and, besides, I intend to live to be a hundred. Now, what do you say?"

"Peace, Annemarie," spoke Miss Varelkamp imperiously. "We have done mischief enough for to-day."

Before Mevrouw Barsselius could retort, the door was thrown open by Mejuffrouw

Varelkamp's Betje, who burst into the room in immediate explanation of her own unmistakable knock. For that was Betje's way of demanding admittance.

Her expression was discontented, and her whole manner betokened a grievance. The grievance, by-the-bye, was Madame de Mongelas.

"She's ringing, and she's calling," began the aggrieved damsel, without any formal introduction, "and Heaven only knows what gibberish she's talking. And I ask you what's the use of speaking a language that nobody can understand?"

Betje regarded the company triumphantly, her arms akimbo. She evidently considered she had propounded a poser.

"Shut the door, Betje," said Suzanna angrily, "and leave the room."

"I can't do that, Mejuffrouw, begging your pardon," retorted Betje, unabashed,

“leastways not as long as I’ve a mortal frame. I must obey my masters, as the Bible says, and nobody more willing, but not conundrums,—no. And, if I shut the door, you won’t hear her calling, and that’s what she told me on purpose to open it for.”

Indeed, even while the handmaid was holding forth, a voice could be heard calling from upstairs—a silvery voice that rang out like a peal of bells. “But mount, then, monsieur,” it said; “you are too cruel. Mount, then, and bring me down to share your circle. I kill myself here with ennui.”

A look of defiance, of amusement, of triumph—injured innocence virtuously victorious—flashed into Arnout’s eyes. He bounded past his aunts without a word; he rushed up the stairs, four steps at a time, and he was down among them again in another moment, carrying in his arms a wonderful little mass of pink muslin and lace, from

which the same laughing voice came forth in ripples. "But, be careful then. Oh, you are careful, only I am so foolish. I am frightened, beyond all things, of doing myself injury. Thank you, you are so kind. I am ungrateful. Ah, it does one good to be here."

She lay back on the hard, old-fashioned sofa on which he had placed her; she lay back with her beautiful head half hidden by the lace of her "*matinée*." Dorothy's clear grey eyes looked into hers, and she smiled back upon them. "I heard you laughing and talking down here," she said, "and I was dying to join you. My leg will hurt less, if you will talk to me. You must introduce me to these ladies, madame."

"I knew I should have my way," said *Mevrouw Barsselius*.



CHAPTER X.

PUNCTUALITY AND THE PARAGON.

“Is dinner to be kept hot for the Juffrouw, Mynheer?” said Piet, as he removed the soup.

“You are new to your place,” replied Mynheer van Donselaar, “or you would not have asked the question.” And Mynheer van Donselaar rubbed his thin hands together and smiled a self-satisfied smile. Karel and Koos, the two sons of the house, looked across at each other and smiled furtively also.

Had the king himself been staying at Steenevest, he would either have partaken of dinner at five o'clock precisely or not have

partaken of it at all. For punctuality was Mynheer van Donselaar's "whole duty of man." In the days when he was making his money—and every penny of it had been made by himself, as a coffee-merchant on the Amsterdam Exchange—this precision had been the means to an end, but now that the end was obtained, the means had remained and become object in their turn. Having nothing more to do with his time, Mynheer van Donselaar constituted himself an absolute slave of the clock, and filled up his too plentiful spare moments by that painfully accurate attention to the exact stage of the hour which is only to be found in very idle persons. It is those who do nothing who are usually most anxious to know exactly how late they are doing it.

Baffled by his clocks, and lacking the patience of a Charles the Fifth, Mynheer had had a sundial constructed on his premises

with the utmost attainable accuracy. But he had forgotten one thing—that the sun only rarely shines in Holland, where three hundred of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year are wet, and that a sundial therefore is as practically useless in that country as a bicycle in the desert. At long intervals he obtained an opportunity of verifying his computations, and it was a strange sight to see his lank figure come rushing out of the house, chronometer in hand, as soon as a ray of watery sunlight crept forth between the clouds. He would sit by the window for hours together, and his face would grow longer, and his temper shorter, through the steady downpour of a Dutch summer. Poor man! He had counted the sundial among his possessions for several years, and he was still striving to reckon out to a second its divergences from railway-time and from his watch. The worst of it all was that, in

default of the sundial, the whole household had to regulate itself by Mynheer van Donselaar's watch, and that this authority itself was by no means beyond little irregularities. With that obstinacy which only a fine full-grown hobby can develop, Mynheer van Donselaar refused to part with the old-fashioned time-keeper which his father had given him some forty years ago. He wound it up every evening at half-past ten precisely, and he believed in it all through the day. He believed in it, and throughout its conflicts with the dial he had a sneaking desire to take its part. One of his chief reasons for constructing the latter machine had been his anxiety to prove his old watch infallible ; and now, when the two fell out, he would shake his head at the new-comer with half-regretful reproach. He was not quite so certain, after all, that his father's watch did not know best.

“Why not tell us exactly how late it is, instead of always telling us it is too late,” grumbled Karel, the elder son. But he grumbled *sotto voce*, and he did not permit himself even such limited opposition before he came to man’s estate. Mynheer van Donselaar was not accustomed to any opposition from anybody. He had been a paragon all his life, and he had taken care that on this subject, as well as on all others, every one who came into contact with him should know and should share his opinion. When his father died suddenly and left the affairs of “Donselaar & Sons, coffee-brokers,” in sad confusion, young twenty-year-old Diederik at once took the management of matters into his own hands, sending his incapable elder brother about his business, which had never by any means been the firm’s. He supported his mother and his seven sisters with relentless propriety, making the old woman’s life

a burden to her by his tacit air of injured innocence, and marrying out all her daughters without any consideration of their personal predilections. By the time he was thirty-five the whole thing was over. The mother had found rest by the side of her bankrupt husband, beyond the reach of her respectable son's reproachful honesty; the daughters had settled down in their families as best they could, most of them fairly contented with the eligible consorts their worthy brother had procured for them, and glad, in any case, to be out of the way of that relative's benefactions. And then the model son became a model husband. He offered his hand to a timid little cousin who had been the admiring spectator of his virtue since her childhood; and she, too frightened to refuse him, accepted, and never quite recovered from her fright. She obeyed him with heart and soul and body; and, when she could no

longer continue so arduous a task, she did what she knew to be her duty—she died. She thought everything admirable that he said and did. I believe she would have loved him, were it not that love casteth out fear. She could never get as high as that. But when he once told her—late in life—that his heart had been another's, she admired him for the confession. She felt that if he had not married earlier, it was for the sake of those at home. In fact, he was virtue personified, virtue in its most satisfactory form of perfect self-righteousness. He had never done a wrong thing, or, worse still, a foolish one. And, therefore, in the prime of his life he was able to buy a smart little estate in the country, and to retire thither with his daughter Dorothy and his two sons. He had put the two sons into his own business, without stopping to inquire whether they cared for it. They went to and fro,

and their father used them as his machines. God was well pleased with him ; the world was well pleased with him ; he was well pleased with himself. And he knew what o'clock it was.

Why not, indeed, hang up a responsible time-piecer in the hall and have done with it ? That would have simplified matters beyond endurance, and, besides, the hall clock—for of course there was a hall clock—had allowed itself too inexcusable liberties in the very face of Mynheer van Donselaar's chronometer to enable him to confer upon it any official authority. In one word, Mynheer van Donselaar knew what o'clock it was, and everybody else in the household must find out as best he could what o'clock Mynheer van Donselaar knew it to be.

He had plenty more fusses and fancies, had Dorothy's father. Some of them are hardly worth mentioning ; some of them the

patient reader will find out for himself. His articles on the culture of roses, are they not written in "The Netherlands Gardener;" and was it not he who worked out in three letters to the Utrecht *Courant* that marvellous system of poor relief in Java which would have resulted in every Javanese doing his duty—and paying his duty—to the glory of the Dutch fatherland and the enrichment of the coffee-brokers? He had the letters framed and glazed, solidly framed, and they hung in his "study," where he sat, watch in hand, among his reports of the Chamber of Commerce and files of the *Commercial Gazette*, waiting for the sun to creep out across the dial.

Dorothy had been staying, as we have seen, with the Widow Barsselius. She was to have returned by the 4.45, and the 4.45 had not brought her. Enough, in itself, to disturb the equanimity of her father, even if

that gentleman had not walked to the little tram-station, an eighth of a mile, to welcome her. Not that Mynheer van Donselaar especially cared for his only daughter. What heart he had, and he had a sort of heart—nonsense, we all have, even the paragons—what heart he had was given up to his eldest son, Karel, the “tree-bearer” as we say in Holland, a young fellow of one and twenty, and most like his father in face and form. “But I never let him do as he likes,” said Mynheer van Donselaar. “It is the curse of our age, that the young people are allowed to do as they like!”

Allowed to do as they liked! Well, perhaps Mynheer van Donselaar was right. Certainly it cannot be denied that the relation between fathers and their grown-up sons is nowadays chiefly a question of allowance. To Karel Donselaar his father was the principal of the firm, and in so far, if no

further, that principal was to him a matter of interest.

Good heavens! is this serious chronicle dropping into punning? Are we to lose our "local colour" by attempts at a joke? Mynheer van Donselaar had never in all his life come into collision with wit or humour in any form. They were not respectable, and to be avoided, like other light things—light women, for instance, and light trousers and light wines. A good joke would have ruined a stronger man even than Mynheer van Donselaar on the "Bourse" at Amsterdam, for "joker" is one of the cruellest epithets a solemn Dutchman can bestow.

Karel Donselaar sat at his father's solid dinner-table and scowled across at Koos. There was not much love lost between the brothers. You could not bring any positive charge against Koos, but he was not as

absolutely reliable as the other gentlemen of the family. He was conscious of vague yearnings after the vanities of the city, and although his father took care they should remain unsatisfied, yet there was something discreditable in the fact of a young merchant hankering after the theatre and the concert-room. Koos was musical, and—like Arnout Oostrum—he loved his violin. There was no harm in playing the fiddle, but there *was* harm in playing it so well. “The man who turns his play into work,” said Mynheer van Donselaar, “will very soon turn his work into play.”

Koos was only eighteen, poor fellow! a year younger than Dorothy; he would outgrow his little failings in time. His health was not strong, and he had a gentle look in his pale-blue eyes which had belonged to his mother before him, and which was very much out of place in that grim old warehouse

on the "Canal of the Roses." They call their canals after roses and lilies in Amsterdam, as the Greeks spoke timidly of the Euxine Sea.

Need it be added that Dorothy adored her younger brother, squandering on him all the tenderness which she could not get rid of to any one else? Tenderness was not a marketable article at Steenevest.

"I wonder," said Koos, "whether anything has happened to Dorothy."

"Happened!" remarked Karel. "What should happen? Old Mother Barsselius has missed the train. If I betted—which I don't—I would lay you a rix-thaler that they turned up at the station in time to see it go off."

"If I betted — which I don't," was a favourite expression with Karel van Donseelaar. It was the next best thing to a wager, and it had the advantage at the same time

of clearly enunciating the speaker's repugnance to all hazardous ventures. It may seem that the expression itself sounded "horsey." Ah well, we must all be young in our day, even Amsterdam coffee-brokers, and the phrase was Karel Donselaar's one public attempt at dissipation.

"I regret that your sister should be exposed to so evil an example," said the old gentleman. "Mevrouw Barsselius is an excellent woman—undoubtedly excellent—but, like most of her sex, she has yet to learn the value of time."

"Dorothy will have enjoyed the change," said Koos. His voice lingered over the word "enjoyed."

"Your sister alone is to blame," answered the father. "It should be impossible for Mevrouw Barsselius to arrive too late, where Dorothy knew we were expecting her."

"But it takes a good deal to influence the

old lady," pleaded Koos ; "in fact, you know she always does exactly what she likes, father. She is the only person in the world who bullies Juffrouw Varelkamp."

"And even she wouldn't bully that old witch, if it weren't for her dollars," sneered Karel.

Mynheer van Donselaar drummed his fingers sharply on the table. He did not approve of the expression. Had it been Koos who used it, he would have told him so.

Koos was staring dreamily at Dorothy's vacant place. How tiresome the old-fashioned room looked with its green curtains and heavy mahogany furniture ! How dull the solid dinner was ! He wondered to himself, for the hundredth time, whether Karel really liked them. The wine was good, certainly ; but Koos did not care for wine.

Karel did, he believed. However, Mynheer

van Donselaar only allowed two glasses, and these he poured out himself.

Life at Steenevest was only bearable, thought Koos, when Dorothy was at home. Fortunately, her departures were few and of brief duration; fortunately for him, and for her also, the persons whom she visited were not possessed of very overpowering attractions. She was often almost glad to get back.

"I wish she were home," said Koos.

"So do I," assented Karel. "We shall hear all about the Frenchwoman as soon as she turns up. That woman has been staying at the Varelkamps for little less than a week. And they say she is there still."

"I might go down to the half-past five tram, father," continued Koos, without heeding his elder brother. "If Dorothy was late at the station, she will come by that." Deviation from previous arrangements was so

unusual in that methodical household that the very idea of his sister's non-arrival made the foolish young fellow uneasy.

"Koos!" said his father in his very sternest accents. The boy's temerity amazed him. "I forbid you to leave the table. It appears to me that the servant's evil example is contagious. If Dorothea prefers to travel during meal times, that is no reason why my dinner should be disturbed."

"What a fool my father is!" thought the elder son, as he bent over his plate. Said the younger to himself: "What a brute!"





CHAPTER XI.

GRAPES, SOUR AND SWEET.

"CAN I help you?" said a well-known voice, as the train stopped at the little Wyker station.

What could Dorothy do? Her hands were full of parcels. It was raining heavily, and the miserable little village station is so constructed, with considerable ingenuity, as to give you a maximum of wading through uncovered slush. It was wet; it was late; she felt flurried by her previous misfortune. And there stood Arnout Oostrum, umbrella in hand.

"You ought not to speak to me, Arnout," she said severely. "You make me very

uncomfortable." But she put her hand in his, as she said it, and he helped her to alight.

"We shall not be alone in the tram," he answered humbly, "and I might have had twenty minutes' *tête-à-tête* already had I chosen. I saw you getting into this compartment at Utrecht, and I——" He stumbled over his own thoughts and paused.

"And you preferred to smoke," she said, with a woman's inconsistency. She laughed into his eyes, laughed at his confusion—and at her own happiness, perhaps.

"Yes," he replied savagely. "I like smoking and drinking. It's all I'm good for, you know."

He was guiding Dorothy from puddle to puddle, screening her and her parcels as well as he could against the pelting down-pour. But all the time he carefully protected a little wicker basket which he had brought with him from the town.

“And flirting with pretty Frenchwomen,” said Dorothy demurely. She thought, poor little thing! that she could say it so safely; but next moment she recognised that she had gone too far.

Arnout’s face flushed angrily. “You have no right to say that,” he cried, “nor anything like it. You know nothing about it. You have never even seen us together since that first day when you came with my aunt.”

“Foolish fellow!” thought Dorothy. “As if I should say it if I knew I had a right to!” But she only remarked aloud: “Of course I was joking, Arnout. Shall I hold that little basket, while you put my box into the tram?”

Arnout blushed even more angrily, while he did as she ordered him. There were two or three people in the car whom she knew sufficiently to bow to, and it was to break a silence that she felt was becoming ridiculous

that she said, as the tram glided away from the station—

“Your aunt Barsselius is coming to see you again, the day after to-morrow. She will give Miss Varelkamp no rest till she has stolen the viscountess away from her.”

“The viscountess,” muttered Arnout with a scowl, “can stay as long as she likes, and she can go away when she chooses.”

“Would you really like her to go?” asked Dorothy mischievously. She was a woman. She could not help herself.

“Yes,” he said between his clenched teeth. He clutched the little basket tightly as he said it. He spoke with such unnecessary energy, that her fair face clouded for a moment, and she hastened to change the subject.

“I missed the dinner-train,” she said; “I shall get into a terrible scrape with my father, I fear. You know he cannot bear us to be

unpunctual. But it was all your aunt's fault, and not mine. She would persist in driving round by 'Seldery's' to get a box of hot-house grapes for your invalid. I told her we had started too late."

"To get what?" asked Arnout impatiently.

"Grapes. She said they would remind Madame de Mongelas of her own country. Grapes in June! It sounds rather extravagant, doesn't it? And they were three florins a pound. But you know, when your aunt has an idea in her head, she usually manages to get her own way."

"Dorothy," said Arnout, "you remember what I said to you the other day—the last time I saw you—before them all? You haven't forgotten?"

She did not answer for a moment. Perhaps she could not. The steam-tram was rushing along between the gaunt lines of melancholy trees under the plashing rain.

It was dark inside, and stuffy, by the false light of a dirty petroleum lamp in the lessening day. The couple of passengers at the other end of the faded crimson cushions were half asleep. He bent forward, still grasping the little basket and his dripping umbrella, and holding them away from her.

“You have no right to speak to me like that,” she burst out at length, angrily. “You have no right to speak to me at all. I told you so before, at the station ! My father does not know yet. Nobody knows. I am not to answer. You have put me a question, and at the same time you have told me not to answer it. I cannot answer it. I should not know how. And until I know how, and until you expect me to tell you, you have no right to speak to me at all. Let me pass, if you please, Arnout. I am going to stand outside, if you please.” She had risen as she spoke, and had turned her back on the people

in the far corner that they might neither hear her voice nor see her face. She was bitterly angry with the young fellow before her.

"You cannot go out into the rain, Dorothy," he said, and she thought he said it coolly. "I am very sorry. I beg your pardon. I did not mean to offend you. Sit down."

"Let me pass," she repeated in an agitated manner. "You are insulting! You are cowardly, Arnout! Let me pass!"

And she swept by him, and went and stood out on the little platform, where the driving rain could beat upon her burning face. What does a Dutch girl care for rain, if it cannot hurt her clothes?

Presently she came back to put her parcels together, for they were approaching the little "halt" near Steenevest. The house stood down a side lane, at a few minutes' walk from the main road. The tram drew

up. Dorothy looked out into the gathering darkness. There was nobody there to fetch her. The rain came down in torrents, and the puddles of the straggling lane lay shimmering between the steaming fields. It was gloomy and miserable and forlorn.

"You must allow me," said Arnout quietly, almost timidly. He helped her out with her parcels, and then he jumped from the tramcar himself.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, stricken with sudden penitence. "I can very well run down the lane by myself. You mustn't lose your place, Arnout. You will have to walk half an hour in the rain!"

His only answer was a wave of the hand to the guard. Then he turned off the road, with a box and a bag of hers in one hand. In the other he held his umbrella over her head, and at the same time he grasped his precious little basket. Thus laden like a

pack-horse he strode down the lane. He was haunted by a longing to turn up his light-coloured trousers, but he felt that the action would be incongruous, and he desisted with regret.

“You had better take my arm,” he presently said, still very mildly. “You won’t get so wet.” And she humbly obeyed—very angry with him still, but touched by the thought of how wet he would be ere he got home—for her sake !

The short lane seemed interminable ; the increasing darkness lay upon her like an accusation of guilt ; the very rain felt like a sorrowful reproach. She *must* say something. “What are you taking home so carefully to your Aunt Suzanna?” she asked. “Eggs?”

No answer.

Another embarrassing silence. Dorothy was deeply offended at his rudeness. “I

shall not say another word to him," she thought to herself.

Then, suddenly, "Grapes for Madame de Mongelas. There!"

She thought he was joking. But she was only the more offended. "Indeed!" she said shortly. And then she splashed right into a puddle, in her confusion and her disdain.

"Yes," he went on. "It sounds rather extravagant, doesn't it? Grapes in June! And they are still three florins a pound—only these cost three fifty." (Oh, the child! the child!) "But, you know, when one gets an idea into one's head, one likes to have one's way. And I thought they would remind her of France."

"That was very considerate of you," said Dorothy, with that air which the French call "pinched." "You are always very considerate, Arnout, and it was kind of you to help me through the rain. I should have

asked you to wait for your aunt Barsselius's grapes—they are in my box—but you will hardly want them now, as you have got some of your own. I shall send them over to Miss Suzanna to-morrow. Thank you, once more ; here we are at the gate. Good-bye."

She made him a little curtsey, as she finished speaking, and held out her hand for her parcels.

"I may as well carry them up to the door," he began, with that cool manner which had already so irritated her.

But she interrupted him with an imperious gesture. "Give me the things," she cried, "and leave me in peace ! Good night."

"Good night, then," he said ; "and God bless you ! Good-bye."

And he turned and left her, walking swiftly down the road.

"Good night, Arnout," she called after him

once more—through the rain, and the darkness, and the gathering sadness of their hearts.

But he did not answer. He passed on along the deserted road, alone with his thoughts, alone with the little wicker-basket and its precious contents. Presently it seemed to him as if he could bear its company no longer. It was speaking to him, perhaps, and he did not like the burden of its remarks. And yet it went on speaking.

He stopped in the middle of the road. To the right and left a steaming sea of vapour across the meadows. In front and behind two endless lines of dripping trees beneath a sinking sky. No human creature in sight.

Not so. Some one was splashing methodically along the road, a dark spot against the grey damp in the distance—a labouring man under a big umbrella.

“Good evening, friend,” said Arnout. “Would you like some grapes that I don’t care to carry any further?”

The peasant stopped his slouching trudge. He thought the other was laughing at him, and he was very careful, like all peasants, about being laughed at. “I like grapes,” he said slowly; “oh yes, young master, I don’t mind grapes.”

“Take them,” said Arnout, holding out his basket. “Perhaps you know some sick person to whom they will be welcome.”

“I don’t know any sick person,” answered the peasant, still in the same slow way. “I’ll eat them myself, young master.”

Arnout broke away without further parley. He looked down at his clothes and saw that they were full of mud. He had ruined them. The stupidity of the thought at that moment threw him into a frenzy of anger and disgust, and he tore down the road like a

madman, crying out to himself aloud that he was a villain as well as a fool!

But all the time, in his heart of hearts, he considered himself an injured saint.





CHAPTER XII.

DOROTHY ASKS A QUESTION AND RECEIVES
AN ANSWER.

THE hall door was never locked till half-past ten o'clock precisely. The far chime from the village steeple mingled evening after evening in the ears of the occupants of the house with the grating of the door-key. Mynheer van Donselaar always locked that door himself.

Dorothy let herself in, her mantle making a terrible drip around her on the white marble with which the Dutch decorate their entrance-halls. Nobody there. A sustained droning from behind the study-door. Koos

reading out his nightly coffee-report to his father.

She crept upstairs to her room, a maidenly little room, all pale chintz and pink roses. Her mother's portrait in the place of honour, the large one which her father had given her on the birthday succeeding their loss. A painful portrait, not because of that sad look in the eyes—she had never known her mother otherwise—but because of the continual recollection which it brought her of the one occasion when her father's kiss had conveyed a message of affection. He pecked her cheek regularly, morning and evening, at half-past eight and at half-past ten.

She sat down for a moment among her little belongings, and noticed how the housemaid had arranged them all awry. They were presents, chiefly, from her brothers and from friends at school—a china shepherdess, an inkstand with "Gruss aus Wiesbaden,"

two uncouth bears from Berne. An old Bohemian glass held a mass of white lilacs ; that was Koos's doing. He must have bought them. Nobody but the head-gardener might gather flowers at Steenevest.

Dorothy's heart softened at the thought of her young brother. It was very bitter still, and very miserable. Need that be added ? When a woman's heart is bitter, it is always miserable. It is only we men who can afford to hate.

A knock came to the door, and that knock brought Koos. " My father would not let me come and fetch you, Dolly," he said ; " I'm awfully sorry. What beastly weather you had ! Who brought your things ? "

" Dolly " was the pet name which Koos bestowed upon his sister when they were alone. As children—in the time when, like all boys, he detested kisses—they had agreed that she might fine him a kiss whenever he

forgot to use it. And so he had got into the habit. What an age ago it seemed!

"I am glad you did not come, Koos," she answered. "It is no weather for young fellows with coughs. How is your throat? Did you put on the cold-water compresses regularly, as I told you to do? Are you better?"

What could Koos say? He had not put on the water compresses. He was delicate, and apt to take cold; but he was not consumptive, as Dorothy insisted upon dreading. Nursing him was her agony, and her joy.

"Oh, I'm all right," said Koos. "And I took the thingummy, Doll. What d'ye call it? Aconite. I took it all."

He had done so. A solution had been left him, to be imbibed in half-hourly sips. He had swallowed down the whole at a gulp. But, at any rate, the tumbler was empty. And her soul was content.

"Good boy," she said. "I have brought you a present from Mevrouw Barsselius. You know you were always a prime favourite of hers. She has sent you the old Dutch airs which Barends has recently arranged for the violin. I will unpack them for you as soon as the tram-people bring my trunk. Is my father very angry?"

"Oh, bother!" began Koos impatiently, but Dorothy would not allow that. He knew it. She kept up the comedy of filial affection with a beautiful conscientiousness worthy of a better cause.

"Hush," she said. "Let us go down to him. Where is Karel? Is he at home?"

"No," said Koos shortly.

"Where is he then?"

"I don't know. After no good, I fancy. It's no business of mine, or of yours. Well. Let's go down to the kitchen first. I told the cook to keep some dinner for you."

"I am not hungry," said Dorothy ; and the tide of her own affliction was borne in upon her from the depth of Koos's astonished stare.

"Nonsense, Dolly ! You've had nothing to eat since luncheon, I'll be bound. Since when have you given up being hungry ? Left your appetite in town ?"

Dorothy's appetite, as a rule, was uncontrolled by affectation. She laughed. It seemed too ridiculous to leave one's dinner untouched because one was wroth with one's lover.

So they crept down to the kitchen, these two—very softly, lest their father should hear them. And Mina, the cook, who had been in the family fifteen years, because she had lived out the first twelve months (a rare occurrence !) made her young mistress welcome and set out on the kitchen table the warmed-up remains of the evening meal. Motherly old Mina regarded the young

people more or less as her own children. She found the fussy tyrant upstairs very easy to manage. She served him his dinners to the moment, and if he crossed her in any matter of importance she hinted that she was ready to go. His children could not give him warning. He had them there.

Dorothy swallowed a few morsels to please her brother and Mina, and then she had to give her account of the fortnight spent in town. While Koos sat kicking his feet against the dresser and the old servant pottered about among her saucepans and dishes, the young mistress told how she had been to see Mina's sister, the widow who lived in the "Walenhof," the Walloon almshouses, and how her asthma was better than it had been in spring. "My sister was always up and down," remarked Mina parenthetically; "and there's nothing to grow old by like asthma. I suppose 'tis because

it saves a body's breath." The recital of the old widow's quarrels with her pauper neighbours was broken short by an imperious peal of the drawing-room bell, the master's peal. It sent the brother and sister upstairs in a flying hurry, just in time to meet the manservant, Piet. "Mynheer is asking for the Juffrouw," he said. Dorothy brushed back her hair, with a movement of the hand, and went in to her father.

"A—ah," said Mynheer van Donselaar. He was leaning back in his armchair, his slippered feet stretched out before him, his spectacles aslant over his pasty face and Roman nose. His daughter saw at a glance that he had not really been put out, but that he was going to amuse himself by "showing disagreeable." She knew the symptoms. This was what the Paragon—with a capital P—called feeling "not anger, but regret."

"I am glad to perceive, by ocular demon-

stration, Dorothea, that you are returned. I should hardly have become acquainted with the fact, had I waited until you thought fit to inform me of it."

Dorothy went up to the tea-table.

"Oh, thank you," said her father, "you need give yourself no superfluous trouble. I have poured out my tea for myself."

"I missed the train, papa," said Dorothea. "I could not help it. *Mevrouw Barsselius* would not order the carriage earlier. When you stay with people, you must do as they like."

But *Mynheer Donselaar* never allowed two grievances to be muddled up into one. He took out his watch and he scanned it attentively.

"You came, I presume, by the eight o'clock tram. Am I not correct?" he said.

"Yes, papa. It was the first that would take my luggage."

“Very well. Then, allowing seven minutes for the walk to the house, I still find thirty-three unaccounted for. It is now twenty minutes to nine.”

“I ran upstairs to change my things, papa. It is pouring with rain. And then,” continued Dorothy, disdaining subterfuge, “I saw Koos and went with him——”

Her father waved the hand that held his nightly newspaper.

“No, thank you, Dorothea. I have asked no excuses, and I require none. Where filial piety has not spoken, paternal affection may well hold its peace. But I must say that if you had shown due consideration for my wishes, it would have been impossible—I repeat, impossible—for Mevrouw Barsselius to cause you to miss the train.”

“I am sorry, papa,” said Dorothy wearily. “I can say no more than that. There is something else—of more importance—I

would speak to you about, if you can listen to me."

"You must allow me to finish my paper first," said the Paragon. "I am late as it is. My whole evening has been deranged by your thoughtlessness. It is like you, Dorothea, to tell me that some little trumpery interest of yours is of more importance than the comfort of the whole family. I don't speak of myself, mind, but your mother would never have said that. Your mother was an estimable woman, Dorothy."

"Indeed, papa, she must have been," said Dorothy. It was all she could do to keep the sneer of the words from breaking forth in her voice. She could safely have sneered at her father. Therein lay the danger. His ear was impervious to irony. And Karel, at any rate, availed himself of that circumstance, whenever he thought fit.

"You must wait till I have read the

paper," continued Mynheer van Donselaar querulously. "And then you can tell me about it, while I am having my game of 'Patience.' But, if you have bought too many dresses and overstepped your allowance, I would rather not hear of it, Dorothy. I warned you before you went to Mevrouw Barsselius. She is wasteful, but she has got money to waste. I can't give you a penny extra. You know it is against my rule. You must make the deficit good next month."

"It is not money," said Dorothy scornfully. She paced up and down the room, while her father finished his paper. This, then, was her home-coming. She had expected nothing else; yet her heart rebelled at the fulfilment of its expectations. It felt sore all over, and she was wrathful, above all things, with herself for the soreness. She was not sentimental, she told herself, and she detested all

things maudlin, and yet here she was crying for a little motherly sympathy, which she knew she could not get. Mevrouw Barselius was the last person to offer it. She had bantered the girl all through the week with her love-story, getting such rough fun out of it as made the fat widow's rubicund chops shake like a jelly. It had never struck her that Dorothy might not relish the joke.

Mynheer looked round uneasily. His daughter's tramp disturbed his appreciation of the wise deliberations of the Amsterdam Town Council. And, besides, the movement seemed to him very unladylike. He had a horror of all things improper, except when propriety clashed with his comfort. He did not mind, you see, letting his daughter come home alone in the rain.

Dorothy noticed her father's movement. She came and stood by the tea-table, and began washing up the cups. She did it

mechanically, but she was a Dutch housewife. There was no danger that she would let one fall.

“Well?” said Mynheer van Donselaar at length, laying down his paper. “And what is this important matter? We have still half an hour before supper-time to talk it over. Reach me my cards, Dorothy, if you please.”

There was a kind ring in his voice. He had greatly improved in temper. His newspaper had agreed with him, as Koos was wont to say. Formerly it used to be a matter of anxious inquiry with the children, how papa had “taken” his paper. It smoothed him down all over, or it rubbed him up the wrong way. Mynheer van Donselaar’s “paper” was the commercial intelligence, with a dash of Amsterdam small talk thrown in.

Dorothy welcomed the change with a

smile. She got the cards, though not without an uncomfortable twinge of self-reproach, for it was her regular duty to read out the news to her father while he played his two games of "quarante-neuf." She would have surprised you by her knowledge of the prices of "Java" and "Fine old Brazil." The self-reproach was none the less disagreeable, because she felt that she had no cause for it. There is nothing in the world so irritating as unreasonable self-reproach.

"Let me tell you about it quietly, father," she said. And she sat down close by his side.

"Yes, child, that is right," said the father. "Only, before you begin, I wish you would tell me, now I think of it, exactly what time it was at the Overstad station when you left?" And he brought out the abominable old watch, his master, and peered anxiously into his daughter's face.

The girl's heart recoiled again for a moment ; then she too drew forth her watch and compared it with her father's. There was a difference of no less than three minutes—a great blow to the old gentleman—and he fussed about it, and speculated on it, and examined the works to account for it, till Dorothy could stand the tension no longer.

“ I wanted to tell you this, papa,” she said, as carelessly as she could, “ that Arnout Oostrum has asked me to be his wife.”

If she had calculated on a great “ coup,” a sudden revulsion of feeling, she was doomed to fresh disappointment. Mynheer van Donselaar slowly finished winding up his watch ; then he held it to his ear, and gently shook it ; then he put it into his fob, and began wiping his spectacles.

Neither broke the silence for a few moments. Mynheer van Donselaar peered sideways through his spectacles, and then set

to polishing them with increasing energy. Dorothy knew neither what she hoped nor dreaded. Her one feeling was that her anger was kindled against Arnout, and that somehow it made her so miserable to be angry with him that she wanted comfort, and even advice. Ay, actually she felt that she needed advice.

Said Mynheer van Donselaar at length :
“I object. Absolutely and irrevocably, I object. The boy has, I consider, behaved disgracefully. I shall never consent to the match.”

Suddenly Dorothy realised how unprepared she had been for this answer. Though the subject had never been mooted between her and her father, it had somehow of late become a pretty safe possibility that Arnout would sooner or later make a proposition of this kind. Perhaps Mejuffrouw Varelkamp's aspirations in this direction had mutely com

municated themselves to others. However this be, Dorothy had fancied—vaguely, for the whole subject had been vague to her, one on which she dared not allow her thoughts to rest—had fancied vaguely that her father would not make any overwhelming objections, that he would only oppose her wishes as long as it amused him to do so. But what direction would her wishes take? Hush! that was a question which it were “sin” to consider—as yet.

“I put my foot down,” said Mynheer van Donselaar. “I am master in my own family. I wish you would ring, Dorothea; I cannot understand why Piet does not fetch away the tea-things. I request that you will never mention the subject again.”

Dorothy rose, but she did not move towards the bell-rope. She confronted her father. The forbidden question was answered once for all, and on the blank page of her life

the recording angel had written down the answer, and sealed it with her heart's red blood. It is an answer which no woman gives twice, if she gives it at all. It is an answer which, should she withhold it, leaves her life a meaningless voice in the void.

That evening, for the first time in her life, Dorothea's eyes blazed down revolt at her father. She towered over him in all the splendour of her purity, her loneliness, her maidenhood. And her heart rejoiced within her, in the midst of its misery, at the thought of his impotence to hurt her, of his powerlessness to deprive her of this new-born treasure of secret delight. What could he do but say : You may not marry ? The thought of his wishing to say it, or of her desiring him to unsay it, did not enter her head that night. It was love she was thinking of, love, all-sufficient, all-resplendent, victorious and irresistible. And her father's " I forbid

it," shrivelled down into a cruel but meaningless jest.

She answered him very little. "I love him," she said quietly. "You can hardly forbid me that." And then she stopped to ring the bell for the tea-things, and walked out of the room.

"It is the spirit of the times," said Mynheer van Donselaar to himself, as soon as he had recovered his breath, "and Dorothea always had a tendency towards insolence. It should have been whipped out of her before she was five, as I whipped it out of the boys. But her mother was always a poor feeble creature. And feeble parents make headstrong children. I should never have dared to say to my father what my children say to me."

Presently, however, he smiled, a mean little smile. After all, the money was in his

hands, and Arnout Oostrum was a pauper. Dorothy was just barely nineteen; she would not be of age for four years. Silly young people. He felt ruffled all over his methodical little soul by the idea that Arnout should have approached a daughter of his without his leave. A man who could act thus towards Mynheer van Donselaar was for ever unworthy of the august title of son-in-law. But no little differences with Dorothy could disturb the placid repose of his soul, with a rise of ten per cent. in the coffee-market. He was sorry, he told himself, to cross the girl in anything. He must not consider what was most agreeable, but what was his duty to his child.

He meant it too. Most certainly he meant it. There were half a dozen reasons why he should hesitate, and this was not the manner, at any rate, in which such questions deserved to be treated. Poor little Dorothy! She

would cool down by to-morrow and ask his pardon. He must not bestow it too readily.

"Where is Karel?" he asked Koos, who came in to supper.

"Karel? Up in his room, I suppose," said Koos.

"Feeble parents make headstrong children." A truism, Mynheer van Donselaar. Let Koos give you another—he is a good fellow, none the less: "And tyranny is the father of lies."

Dorothy ran up to her room, her whole frame in a quiver of joyous laughter. It was wrong; she felt it was wrong, indecorous, unfeeling. But she could not help herself. Oh the brightness of it, the happiness of it, the warm, the golden sunlight of it! She had been angry with Arnout Oostrum; she was angry with him still, perhaps; but oh the sweetness of an anger from which the

bitterness has passed away ! She would scold him when next they met ; she would scold him severely. No, no ; she would never dare to meet him again. She was frightened at the idea of meeting him. Never would she venture to speak to him of the subject. Never would any conversation be possible between them on any subject whatsoever.

She sat down before the uncurtained window, alone with her happiness in the dark. The rain had ceased, and great masses of cloud were driving rapidly across a watery moon. The tumult of the stormy summer night was at discord with the peace within her, the peace of a heart lying anchored for ever in the face of coming danger. A lost moonbeam, fluttering downwards, fell for a passing moment across the pensive portrait on the wall. She watched it come and go, and then, suddenly, silently, she sank on her knees.



CHAPTER XIII.

A STORM IN AN EGG-CUP.

"HAND me the egg, Betje," said Mejuffrouw Varelkamp sharply; "I can't bear to look at you any longer. It gives me the fidgets. You are very stupid, Betje. You don't even know how to beat up an egg."

"Humph!" said Betje.

"You're as stupid as a hen," continued Suzanna, vigorously whisking round the creamy mess in the little bowl. "Providence brings you an egg, and you don't even know what to do with it."

"I'd know quick enough," protested Betje, "only I never get a chance except on Easter Monday. And if you'd only buy one of

those egg-whipper things that Mina has up at Steenevest, you'd save yourself and me a deal of trouble, Juffrouw. Especially when French people come into the house, that seem to think that God Almighty intended man for an omelet."

"Why for an omelet?" asked the Juffrouw, suddenly interested. It was no use speaking figuratively to Mejuffrouw Varelkamp. She only understood her own similes, graphic enough sometimes, never anybody else's.

"Humph!" said Betje. Her mistress knew that that enigmatical word contained the essence of all Betje's religion and philosophy, and of most of her passions and affections. She was a woman of little knowledge and much wisdom, and her silence, at any rate, was golden. Silence is always a beautiful thing in a woman. But it is not till we meet with it in a confidential maid-servant that we know what a very beautiful

thing it can be. Betje could be silent when she chose, and she could also talk. Good heavens! how she could talk!

She was not afraid of Miss Varelkamp, but she stood in awe of her undeniable virtues. She had an open eye for those virtues, and secretly venerated them. And therefore—marvellous to behold—she was possessed of another quality, rare enough in most women, but phenomenal in a domestic servant; she was capable of occasionally admitting—at least to herself—that she might have been in the wrong. She accepted her mistress's not infrequent scoldings with a certain amount of equanimity. She accepted them the more meekly, if anything, when she felt them to be totally undeserved, for she knew that Miss Varelkamp would be certain to realise that fact in an hour or two, and she could tell by experience that there was no surer prelude to "a good time all

round" than such a moment of unmerited reproach. And, after all, in those matters which seemed to Betje the only ones of any importance here below (except the weekly doze in church), the routine of housework, cleaning and cookery, Juffrouw Varelkamp knew what's what, and her maid was aware that she did. There was not a housewife in all the country-side could make a gulden go farther than Miss Varelkamp. Guldens were very scarce at the cottage. Betje was proud of the use Miss Varelkamp made of them. She was even proud—with an intense loyalty—of their scarcity. Her own wages were low enough, Heaven knows. She would have been glad to get more, but, knowing this to be impossible, she was proud of earning so little. "Our Juffrouw's guldens," she would remark to Arnout, "contain a hundred and twenty cents." She was fond of Arnout, of course. He was a

bit of the cottage, and the cottage, as a unity, was her religion. But she had one great objection to him. As she often told him, "he thought that guldens were made to melt."

Betje was a charity child. She had been with Miss Varelkamp for thirty years, ever since she was twelve. The roses on her hard cheeks were several shades darker than those on her crisp cotton dress. On Sundays her great mob-cap was an imposing structure of white silk ribbons and lace. The savings of her lifetime had been sunk in that cap. Yet it was not vanity that the cap represented, but respectability. She abhorred "man," or, as she called him, "the men." He was her personification of evil, just as "our house" was her embodiment of good. But the thing she abominated even more than "the men" was that vanity in woman to which she alluded as "those giddy girls,"

viz. the vanity of those things she possessed not, the vanity of the power to please the masculine sex. And she despised luxury; she despised it in her mistress's words, "the God-forgetting luxury of our days." Luxury to her meant as many eggs in a pudding as were written down in the cookery book.

"Not that I want an egg-whipper," she said, as she stood admiringly watching her mistress for one moment. "I could do it as well without, Juffrouw, if I only had the time. But I've *not* the time to wait upon French papists and do all my work as well."

"I have heard that remark several times in the last week, Betje," said the Juffrouw, calmly heaping up the stiff foam. "And I have told you before that it is not devoid of truth. And that is why I try, as far as I can, to do both my own work, and some of yours."

Betje's heart smote her. She had gone to

bed an hour or two later during the last week. She did not know—and she did not like to guess—how much later Miss Varelkamp had gone.

The stranger was a great incumbrance in the little house, and Betje deeply resented her presence. She hated her. But it was not on account of the extra work. It was on account of the extra expense, which she well knew Miss Varelkamp was not able to bear.

Hitherto-unheard-of delicacies had been seen in the cottage kitchen. The doctor ordered them. The patient asked for them. Well, no, she did not ask for them ; but she somehow signified their absence. And Betje's spirit boiled within her as she cooked them. "It goes above my understanding," said Betje, "why a person's tongue wants tickling because they squeeze her shins." This was Betje's idea of "massage." Already the Frenchwoman had consumed three bottles

of claret and half a bottle of port wine. "And of the very best," said Betje, resentfully. This was an additional grievance, that Mejuffrouw Varelkamp would not buy second-rate things. Even for herself she would take the commonest, but the best of its common kind.

And neighbour's Cornélie was in constant attendance. Not that Betje objected to this. She enjoyed having a young girl under her to bully and educate and generally "superintend," even as Miss Varelkamp superintended her. She would make a perfect servant of any young girl entrusted to her care, as perfect a servant as—— Oh no; Betje was not vain. She was humble with that beautiful humility which delights in its own virtue, because it is not of itself. She "thanked God and Mejuffrouw Varelkamp she was not like those giddy girls."

Neighbour's Cornélie *was*. Her hair was

giddy—it frizzled ; and her eyes were giddy—they danced ; and her nose was giddy—it turned up. She was giddy all over, as she came skipping down the lane ; but the giddiness left her when she turned into Miss Varelkamp's little garden. They called her “ Keetje ” in Miss Varelkamp's house. And nobody was ever giddy in Betje's kitchen. They couldn't be.

In that kitchen Cornélie's bright locks had to be smoothed under Keetje's little cap. It had been the *conditio sine quâ non* of her engagement. And her mother, the lodge-keeper of the great house farther up the road, had overruled Cornélie's rebellious tears. She was glad enough that the child should learn something besides hair-curling, a great girl of seventeen ! So, after weeks of anxious deliberations with herself in her chamber, Mejuffrouw Varelkamp announced to Betje that she had resolved “ to take the washing

into the house," as she said. She never asked advice of Betje, or talked anything over with her; that was a characteristic "unwisdom" in the self-willed old woman. She arranged for herself all the little "important decisions" of her life. She now engaged Keetje, "and mind, you are to bring a clean apron, *Keetje*," to come two days in the week for the sum of one gulden in all, and her dinner. And then she set to teaching Betje washing, ironing, and starching as these arts had never been practised before. And Betje taught Keetje, as much as Keetje was able, or willing, to learn.

Said Betje to her Juffrouw suddenly, as the latter stood, egg in hand, ready to leave the kitchen, "It can't be helped. And you mustn't mind me, Juffrouw. But tell you I must."

Miss Varelkamp paused, and set down the large cup—her father's, with "From Friend-

ship" on it in tarnished gilt. Something in the maid's manner frightened her. Could Betje be "agitated" ?

"What is it, Betje ?" she said.

"It's just this, Juffrouw, that I wish the girl had never come into the house. It's not the girls whom you have to *tell* to wear a cap that should be taken into situations as ours."

"Has Keetje broken another of the best dishes ?" asked Mejuffrouw Varelkamp anxiously.

"There are worse things to be broken than dishes," replied Betje, shaking her head vehemently. "'Can a man take fire in his bosom and not be burned?' The blessed Bible knows all about it, Juffrouw."

And she shut up her lips with a snap.

"If the creature flirts with the tradespeople," said Mejuffrouw Varelkamp, much relieved, "you must not let her open the door to them."

“And am I to play nurse to the slattern?” cried the handmaid in crimson indignation. “Then you’d best lock both doors of the kitchen. There’s young fools inside the house as well as outside, Juffrouw Varelkamp. And there’s those I’ve had on my knees when they were babies that have got beyond listening to an old woman like me.”

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp understood. Her hard old face grew harder, if possible, and whiter. She did not believe a word of Betje’s accusation.

“How dare you insinuate such things!” she cried in great wrath. She took the cup up again. It trembled in her hand. “My nephew! A student of theology and a gentleman! And a dirty servant-girl like—Faugh! You are a very wicked woman, Betje. A very, very wicked woman!” And she stalked out of the kitchen, her gaunt figure erect, her Roman nose in the air.

She had got more than half-way up the steep staircase before she definitely resolved in her mind to come down again. She marched back upon Betje, still holding out in front of her the yellow mass with its protruding spoon.

"Produce your proofs," she said; "not that you have got any."

Betje, with two bright spots on her usually rosy cheeks, faced away from the hearth. "Judgment doesn't belong to me," she said, "and 'tis a fool that hearkeneth not to understanding." Miss Varelkamp did not wince. "But when a young man and a young woman walk evening after evening in the moonlight, then Lord have mercy on the young man, says I. The young woman, artful minx, can look after herself."

"Let me hear that again," says Suzanna, "distinctly. You said 'In the moonlight,' Betje; do you mean the lane?"

"I do," replied Betje, solemnly setting her arms akimbo; "but I can't say 'God Almighty,' Juffrouw, because it's the city of the great King."

"I did not ask you to," said Suzanna sharply. "And when you spoke of the young man, you meant my nephew Arnout; and when you spoke of the young woman, you meant—" a gulp—"Keetje?"

"Even so, amen," said Betje, feeling as if she were in church.

Miss Varelkamp turned without another word, and jerked herself upstairs again. The expression is not an elegant one, but it best describes Miss Varelkamp's movements. Rapidity was the old lady's most marked characteristic, both in action and in thought. She lived in jerks.

She stood in the little lobby. "Arnout!" she called in her shrill voice, "Arnout!"

Young Varelkamp was reading to Madame

de Mongelas. He came out of the lady's room, a yellow-cover novel in his hand.

"Come down to me immediately," said his aunt.

She led the way into the kitchen, where Betje still stood as if transfixed. Young Arnout followed, wondering.

"Arnout," began Miss Varelkamp in a self-satisfied voice, "oblige me by telling Betje this moment that it is not you who walk up and down the lane of evenings with neighbour's Keetje. There is some misunderstanding which must be at once cleared up. Do as I bid you."

Arnout coloured up to the roots of his hair. He was humiliated and annoyed. He looked round the mean little kitchen—mean and clean—and at the pink servant, half anxious, half defiant by the stove, and at his prim old aunt, with her air of conscious triumph, the forgotten cup still prominent

before her meagre bust. His head was full of the open page in his hand, on which the countess was just telling the handsome tenor that her heart was not her husband's. The whole situation was ludicrous, insulting, insupportable. He scowled at the two eager women, a very ugly scowl from his bright young face.

"Keetje?" he said. "Keetje? What do you mean, Tante Suze? I wish Keetje and the idiot that runs after her were at the bottom of the Zuyder Zee." And he turned on his heel.

"It's all right, you see, Betje," said Suzanna, with a shrewd smile. "Our Arnout never called himself an idiot yet, and I don't think he ever will."

But before the young gentleman had reached the kitchen door Betje had run after him and had caught up his hand, which she was vehemently kissing and fondling and

pressing to her lips. He tried in vain to escape her. "God bless you, Jongeheer," she said—and he hated above all things to be called "jongeheer"; "but you remember, when you were little, 'as an ox goeth to the slaughter'—as an ox. Dear Heaven, I fear me you will go like an ox when the time comes. Oh, I am so glad. Don't be angry with your old nurse who loves you. Oh dear, dear!" And Betje sat down on the kitchen floor and wept.

Arnout broke away and ran upstairs, two steps at a time. He was very much disgusted, and somewhat amused, and—yes, yes, why not give him his due?—and a little bit glad of the fulness and entireness of his "No."

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp stood placidly gazing at Betje, huddled up on the floor in confusion of body and soul. She had it in her mind to commence a terrible scolding,

but the faithful servant's tears disarmed her. And the plenitude of her victory rendered her magnanimous.

"The idea!" she said vigorously. "My nephew! The impudence of it, Betje!" But she said no more.

As she stood there, her glance suddenly fell on the forgotten cup in her hand, and her manner immediately changed. "Dear Heaven!" she said, with genuine concern. "It has all gone down. I shall have to beat up a fresh one. What a pity of the egg! *And* the port."

Betje picked herself up slowly from the floor. "Thinketh no evil," she muttered half aloud. "I wonder—I do wonder, who the fellow is?"





CHAPTER XIV.

UN ABBÉ À MARIER.

ARNOUT went back immediately to Madame de Mongelas.

“Eh bien,” she said, looking up from her flower-painting, “and Canzini?”—Canzini was the tenor—“what has he replied to the countess?”

“What should he reply, madame?” said Arnout, resuming his low seat by the couch. “If the count is unkind, Canzini must kill him.”

Madame laughed a musical little laugh. “You child!” she said. “He will not kill the count, but he will make love to the countess. It is simpler. And more agree-

able to all three, and to monsieur the Procureur-Général."

"And if her heart be empty," said Arnout boldly, and proud of his own boldness, "why should not another man step in and take possession?"

Madame de Mongelas gazed thoughtfully out of the window. A far-away look came into her great black eyes.

"A woman's heart is never empty," she said softly. "You may be sure, *mon garçon*, that Canzini had filled it before she discovered there was no room for the count."

There was a moment's silence. Arnout was wishing he could say brilliant things, such as this elegant, charming creature was doubtless accustomed to hear. Madame de Mongelas was busy with her own reflections.

"Nonsense," she said, with a complete change of voice. "What does a serious young man like you know of such matters? But

you are an abbé, monsieur, or next best—or worst—to one. An abbé à marier! How droll it sounds! A Dutch Bayard, allez! A chevalier sans cœur et sans approches!”

She laughed again, oh, how merrily! She was laughing at him. He did not always understand her, but in the laughter and the good-humoured badinage there could be no mistake. He was a child in her eyes, amusing, harmless, above all, respectable; in his, she was a woman of the world, supremely fascinating, on whom he wanted for that very reason to make a good impression. She never said “risqué” things to him. In France all married women said things that he would have thought “risqué.” He would have blushed scarlet, had she done it, but he was angry with her for leaving it undone. He was her “little Provincial.” She treated him like a child.

“Read on,” she said. And he obeyed.

“Maxima debetur pueris reverentia,” he growled to himself. She caught the growl, but not the words. “What is that you mumble to yourself?” she said. “Evil of me?” He laughed off the supposition, and turned to the volume on his knee, but she dropped an exquisite little hand across it. How white the little hand looked on the yellow paper, and what vain efforts it made to spread itself right over the two pages! “What did you say?” she repeated. “You must tell me; or I shall think it was bad.”

No, he did not want to say it. He would not make himself ridiculous by saying it. He was *not* going to say it, he—had he learned as yet to combat a lovely woman’s will? They quarrelled over it, he awkward and stubborn, she graceful, kindly, teasing—and at the last just a little bit offended. That brought him round at once.

“Guess it for yourself, madame,” he said,

as sullenly as he dared. And he repeated the words.

She listened, with a smile for the easy victory around her handsome lips. The little squabble amused her. The boy amused her. She wanted amusement, ceaseless amusement, as another looks for daily bread. She took it where she could in the dull little house.

"Maxima," she repeated, knitting her brows. "*Une maxime d'Hébé est la pure révérence.* No, no ; it isn't that. Don't tell me ! I must guess. How stupid I am !" She spread out her arms as if to keep him off. "Say it again. Say it slowly !" Her vanity was touched.

Again he obeyed her, angry with himself for doing so.

"Puer," she said slowly, "*puéril.*" Suddenly she looked full at him. It was her turn to colour. "I have it," she said quietly, "'We owe the greatest reverence to the

young.' It is true. How true it is! Thank you, mon chevalier."

She looked at him. Perhaps she was thinking more of herself than of the boy before her; but yet, as she looked, she could not help understanding the expression of his face. He was deeply mortified. Poor boy! his morning had not been of the pleasantest. She had the good sense to spare him further chagrin.

"I mean, thank you for telling me, monsieur," she said sweetly. "You have too much usage of the world to contradict a woman. Thank you for your kindness in reading to me, but I think we shall read no farther this morning. My head is tired, and I am going to repose myself. And, after all, the loves of Monsieur Canzini are hardly worth reading aloud."

She dismissed him with a gracious nod of that exquisite head. Then she lay back in

her cushions and took up the story he had left unfinished. She blushed several times to herself as she read. Monsieur Canzini and his countess were having a merry time of it together, short and sharp, with pistols for two and laudanum for one at the end. She blushed—for thought of the boy downstairs who was not reading to her. And she threw the book from her, long before she reached the end, with a weary little sigh of disgust.

“I must send to Paris for the ‘Ami de la Jeunesse,’” she said.

And then again she blushed to herself for the thought.

Juffrouw Varelkamp, in the meantime, was anxiously preparing her guest's luncheon. She had turned to this part of the day's labour as soon as Betje had taken up the long-delayed egg. She was always doing

something for Madame de Mongelas, and it is to be hoped that Madame de Mongelas duly appreciated her devotedness.

That lady had now spent the better part of a week at the cottage—from Monday to Friday. There was no palpable reason why she should stay much longer. The village doctor came twice a day and rubbed the injured foot, and he had declared that although it would be some time before she used it, yet there was no reason why she should not order a carriage and drive whithersoever she would. Madame de Mongelas showed no anxiety to give the order. “And what is to become of your excellent massage, doctor,” she said, “if I go back to the town?” The doctor shrugged his shoulders. He thought his massage excellent, as very probably it was, but professional etiquette obliged him to say so indirectly.

So the vicomtesse stayed at Wyk to complete her cure, and she stayed at the cottage, because neither she nor her hosts felt capable of suggesting a move to the village inn. After the first burst of astonished dismay, Miss Varelkamp had settled down into a not too ungracious recognition of the stranger's claims to hospitality. Young Arnout's declaration to Dorothy had arrived in the very nick of time to ease her mind of anxiety in that direction, at least for the time being, and the lad's simplicity itself continued to disarm her suspicions. He was very much taken by the French lady's charm of manner and grace of pose, by that nameless elegance of the Parisian which blends form and speech and movement in one harmonious whole. He showed his admiration, and talked of it, as any boy might do. He compared the vicomtesse and Dorothy in his aunt's presence—he was always comparing them; and he

pointed out to her how he admired the former lady and how he—loved Dorothy, “don’t you see? It is quite a different feeling, Tante Suze. I can’t help seeing what a beautiful woman Madame de Mongelas is. I—I—admire Kothen Castle, tante; but I live in the cottage.”

Of course. Suzanna smiled on the loves of the young pair. It was the desire of her life to see them united, and she now beheld that desire approaching its fulfilment. Dorothy had more money than Arnout, but it was not the money which largely influenced Miss Varelkamp, though she quietly rejoiced to think he would never know, as she knew it, what the struggle of genteel poverty meant. She had known the Donselaars all her life—she had once known Mynheer van Donseelaar very intimately—she loved Dorothy as a daughter. She deemed her almost worthy of young Arnout’s heart and hand.

She smiled to think of her first foolish anxiety concerning that young gentleman's affections. As she watched the fair invalid lying among her cushions and her laces, a mass of flowered silks and soft perfumes, Miss Varelkamp felt that to connect her charms with the future of a theological student was a wilful leap into romance. She felt, moreover, that it was an insult to the steady boy who had never given her cause to doubt him. That very consciousness drove her, perhaps, in her strict sense of justice, to another extreme of aggressive trustfulness. She had no appreciation of romance in any form ; she knew neither the name nor the thing. Romance ? People used to sing foolish untrue songs in her youth called " romances " ; they did not do so any more. The Bible was all matter-of-fact, and the provincial *Courant* was all matter-of-fact (poor old lady !), and the missionary

reports were all matter-of-fact. The only unrealities she ever met with on paper were the inaccuracies in her butcher's bills. And she "spotted" those with wonderful quickness. True enough, the bills were not over long. They did not eat meat every day at the cottage—at least, not when Arnout was away.

Madame de Mongelas was contented to stay on. She had been travelling through Holland, it appeared, when the accident befell her, and had taken a carriage from Overstad on that day, to drive round the neighbouring villages, a favourite tour with visitors to the town. She had no particular reason to regret the delay. There was nothing to recall her to her home in Paris. "Mon chez-moi," she said bitterly, "eh, ce n'est pas gai d'être toujours seule. Nous autres femmes, nous préférons un chez-nous." She was the widow of a French officer, much

older than herself, who had fallen "au Tonkin," far away among the Chinese. She had enough to "exist" upon, she said, "enough not to die of hunger where the appetite is small." That was all the Varelkamps knew about her. She talked constantly of herself, but very rarely of her circumstances. Judging by her tastes in all matters concerning the wardrobe or the dinner-table, her appetite for the bare means of existence would have satiated a regiment of Miss Varelkamps.

This was one of the reasons why the Widow Barsselius ceaselessly urged that the patient should be transferred to the widow's substantial house in town. There she could have much better care and nourishment, and all the luxuries she had been accustomed to. She frankly told Madame de Mongelas that her sister Varelkamp could not afford to keep her. She told her in Suzanna's

presence, out of kindness to Suzanna, and that there might be no mistake about the matter. "I like simple, straightforward intercourse," she said, "and plenty of it. And I tell you openly, Madame la Vicomtesse, that there's not butter enough in this house for two, let alone for three. Now, at my table you can have as much sweet-stuff as you like, and the ladies of your nation cannot live without 'confitures.' Come to me. I will fetch you in a comfortable carriage. I don't mind the expense."

But Madame de Mongelas softly said she preferred the butter of "la Tante Suze," and so she stayed and contentedly ate the jam which that lady unwearyingly prepared for her. "You must know what you do," remarked the fat widow spitefully, going off in a huff. "It's no business of mine. My relations will have my money when I die, if I choose to leave it them. But they'll have none of

it before that time, and I'm in no hurry to go. So don't you make debts on the strength of that, Suzanna."

This last was a cruel shot, for Mevrouw Barsselius was well aware of her sister's painful scrupulousness. Suzanna had never owed any man anything, no, nor woman either, least of all the Widow Barsselius. But the fat lady was very much put out. She wrote several epistles to the vicomtesse, describing the superior conveniences of her establishment. It was the "vicomtesse," the foreigner, the Roman Catholic that attracted her—all the things, in a word, which repelled Suzanna. But matters standing thus, and the stranger strongly expressing her desire to continue the massage at Wyk, Juffrouw Varelkamp decided, with a pride which was all her own, that her guest must stay as long as she chose. She communicated this resolve to her sister, and the fat widow

answered by return of post. "You will suffer for your vanity, my dear Suzanna," she wrote, "when you sit next winter without a fire. But it has always been your way, with that boy as in all other matters, unreasonably and unnecessarily to deny yourself. I believe you like it. Some people do. Their one pleasure is to have as few pleasures as possible. I send you my best wishes for the success of your scheme, and a bottle of preserved peaches for the invalid. Your affectionate sister, Annamaria Barselius. P.S.—The peaches are of the very best quality, as they can only be procured at my grocer's. The price of a bottle is two guilders thirty-five. Don't you think that is very dear?"

Suzanna sighed. Most things were expensive to her, but it was not the expensiveness of superfluities that caused her wakeful nights. "*My sister* sends you these peaches,"

she said to Madame de Mongelas. "I hope you will like them. And my *sister* asked me the other day whether she should order some champagne. I told her I would ask you if you drank it."

"J'adore le champagne," said Madame de Mongelas, "but I can do without it. I love all good things, dear mademoiselle, except going to confession, and I dislike that because it is so awkward having nothing to confess."

Miss Suzanna did not understand. Her French was very, very rusty, and Arnout had often to act as interpreter between the two ladies. He was making progress, the vicomtesse assured him. "You do not gallop, as yet, mon cher, but at least you have learnt to trot." And whenever he came a cropper, she would clap her hands and cry, "A fall! A fall!" Arnout thought she might have been less merciless in her correc-

tions. But he talked on all the same, with Spartan fortitude. "It is so useful, tante, you know," he said to his aunt. "Just think what a grand opportunity. Whatever she costs you to keep, she saves us in French lessons. It is absolutely necessary to learn French, Aunt Suzanna." "I cannot say I see the necessity," said Aunt Suzanna; "there are more bad books than good ones written in French; and, any way, both get translated, and it don't strike me you pick out the *good*."

This last was a straight shot, for Arnout had returned to his aunt uncut a French missionary report which she had thrust upon his notice, as counterweight to the books he saw in the viscountess's room. The honest fellow had not had the cunning to cut the leaves.

"Calvin was a Frenchman," he said, to make a diversion.

"He was," said Suzanna, "and our Saviour

was a Jew—Lord forgive me the comparison, but I can't help thinking the two were given to each nation to restore the balance, just as the righteous men were counted up in Sodom. Do you think, Jakob, that it's our Christian duty to love the French? As for the Jews—no, I can't."

The young minister had been standing at the window, looking dreamily out. In all theoretical matters of conscience, as he knew by long experience, Suzanna invariably appealed to the "Dominé." The practical ones she settled for herself without any clerical assistance. He wondered quietly, with an amused smile, whether Arnout would take his place as soon as he obtained his degree.

"Not on account of Calvin," he answered; "rather the other extreme, I should say. Besides, Calvin was hardly a Frenchman, Miss Suzanna."

“Calvin was an apple,” burst in young Arnout flippantly—the Dutch call Calville apples “Calvins”—“he was the apple of discord that turned Eve out of Paradise, and we haven’t digested him yet.”

“Arnout!” cried Aunt Suzanna in her most wrathful voice. He shrank back a little; already he repented him of his temerity. “This comes of daily intercourse with frivolous Frenchwomen and idolatrous papists! You, a son of the Reformed Church, soon to be one of her teachers! Oh, Arnout”—her harsh voice faltered just the merest trifle—“you would not have said that a month ago.” She got up and left the room, without another look at her penitent nephew. His careless blow had gone straight to her heart.

“You see, Arnout,” said Jakob, with a slight tinge of colour on his delicate cheek; “some of us old-fashioned people are still

like that. We can't help it. We have our little weaknesses of veneration still. They are small—it is touching to see how they go on decreasing—but they still exist, and they modestly hide away in little sanctuaries of their own. But when people rush into the Holy of Holies and write up 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness. Buy Pears' Soap,' we object. I know it is backward in us, and that makes us all the more sensitive. People didn't apologise for their religion three hundred years ago."

"I won't be sneered at, Jakob," said Arnout hotly. "You're as flippant as I am, if it comes to that. You're always laughing at religion, only you laugh at other people's religion, instead of at your own. There's more real earnestness, I should say, in facing one's own follies than in satirising other men's."

"Earnestness," answered Jakob. "Is it

earnestness you are in search of? That alters the matter. Religion, my friend, is not a matter of comparisons, as most people appear to think. It is the one thing on earth which is not comparable, because it is the one thing which is absolute."

"Don't grow philosophic, Jakob. You know Madame de Mongelas calls you my philosophic friend, 'as philosophic as if he were not pious, and as pious as if he were not philosophic.' She gave me a fine definition of philosophy the other day, which is about the most philosophic thing I ever heard in my life. 'The intentional perversion of a terminology expressly invented for that particular object.' That's your philosophy for you in a nutshell, and this is mine." He flipped his finger against a full-blown rose which was standing on the table. The leaves fell out under his touch.

"I mean," said Jakob, turning timidly

away to the window, "that my religion is not your religion, and that your religion is not my religion. And that nobody but you can know whether your religion satisfies your heart."

There was silence between them for a moment. Said Jakob softly: "Your philosophy, at any rate, is of a transient nature. See, your rose has already lost its leaves."

"My religion," cried Arnout passionately, "is that of all men. And of none. Did I want to study theology? Am I to be better than everybody else because I did so? Candidate of the Holy Gospel! Minister of the Word of God! Am I responsible for the insolent titles? Yes, I am candidate of the Holy Gospel. I am so because I learned a little Hebrew and a lot of Church History. I very nearly missed being it, because I did not know quite sufficient Hebrew, but I was so well up in dead men's heresies, that they

felt I must be fit to stand up as teacher of my own. If I only learn now thoroughly how they elect the Synod and the sub-committees, they will make me a servant of the Church and a minister of God, or is it a minister of the Church and a servant of God? It seems the two can go together, even nowadays. That is my religion. It don't affect my life, you see,—any more than anybody else's. It is a matter of church-membership."

"Poor Arnout!" said Jakob still more softly.

"On the contrary, I am not to be pitied. I am to be praised. By hard work and strenuous effort—three years of student life, including wines and college fees—I shall raise myself to a pitch of holiness above my fellows. Above them by the full height of the pulpit-stairs. They will neither preach nor practise. I, at least, though I do not

practise, shall tell them in my preaching that they ought to. And when everybody has called me 'Right Reverend' for a couple of years, I shall probably begin to believe them. You clergymen always increase in self-reverence. It is a beautiful proof of the hallowing influence of the trade. Who knows how respectable I may find myself in time!"

"Poor Arnout!" said Jakob for the second time. His eyes grew troubled and moist. He was a weakly creature, you see, in constant bad health. He could not help himself. Arnout saw it, but he turned away resolutely and went on.

"Very pleasant, isn't it? To know that you can go on studying and preaching, and that you needn't believe it's really meant. Fancy a religion au pied de la lettre. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. Be ye holy,'—holy, mind you—'*even* as I am holy.' Holy

—holy.” His voice had dropped. He spoke the last words very slowly, and then stopped.

In the living silence that filled the little room, a few more rose-leaves, slowly detaching themselves, fell on the table with a gentle thud.

“Oh, Jakob,” he cried, “I do love what is good and pure and righteous. I do love—God. Oh, my God, my God!”

There was a despair in his voice that rang through the solemn words. Without another look at those sad eyes beside him, he rushed out of the room.

Jakob remained standing where he stood. His look was uplifted towards the full glory of the midday sun. And his lips moved faintly now and then, as if in prayer.





CHAPTER XV.

THE BEAUTY OF DANGER.

SUZANNA felt she must think the whole matter over, but for the moment she was not at liberty to do so. Until madame's luncheon was ready, the duties of the kitchen demanded her hostess's undivided attention. And so Suzanna returned to her stove. On this day of all others she was particularly anxious to achieve success, for—the invalid having complained of a falling away of appetite—she had leaped boldly into extravagance and had actually purchased a fat little pigeon for the lady's special delectation. This costly acquisition, procured and prepared with almost reverential care, had been placed by

Miss Varelkamp's own hands in the roasting-pan, Betje looking on the while with amazement very nearly akin to awe. Betje had now lived more than thirty years with Mejuffrouw Varelkamp, but she had not learned how to roast pigeons.

The precious bird was frizzling in the oven, beautiful in death, the ruddy brown of its fragrant breast a-sparkle with luscious bubbles. Very tenderly Miss Varelkamp lifted it forth at the right moment and placed it on a snow-white dish. She could not help thinking regretfully, as she gazed upon it, how very small it was for eleven pence, but she repressed the thought immediately as ungenerous, and carried her offering unhesitatingly upstairs. Madame de Mongelas had said she was not hungry, and would be quite content with a couple of poached eggs or an omelet. Suzanna recalled this to her mind with a grim smile of satisfaction, as she

paused on the landing. What would Madame de Mongelas say to so luxurious a feast?

The more she felt it to be her unpalatable duty to afford the sick stranger such hospitality as was in her power, the more anxious she became to do well and ungrudgingly what she had undertaken. Perhaps Madame de Mongelas would have experienced a little less punctilious kindness, had Miss Varelkamp been a little less conscious of dislike and distrust. She wished her visitor to go, and therefore she set to making her unreasonably comfortable. She disliked her excessively, and therefore she bade her stay as long as she wished. In all this there was nothing akin to hypocrisy—we have seen sufficiently that Miss Varelkamp was ever the most truthful of women—there was only the stern resolve to be just and the fear of injustice which often overpowered all her other faculties of reasoning. It was when

she considered herself wrong, not when she considered herself right, that Miss Varelkamp became soonest unreasonable.

She went into the room with her tray.

“You are too good, my dear mademoiselle,” said the vicomtesse languidly—she said it twenty times a day, but she never seriously attempted to check the superfluity she complained of. “You are too good, and you give yourself far too much trouble. You and your amiable nephew are quite spoiling me for my solitary life. I do not demand delicacies, dear Miss Suzanna; I should be happy with the humblest, where in your house the humblest is of the best.”

“What will she say when she sees the pigeon?” thought Suzanna. She was in a flutter to reveal it, but she did not care a single stiver for the Frenchwoman’s praise or approval. “She flatters,” she said, “and therefore she lies.” She was quite incapable

of appreciating at its sterling value madame's form of continuous courtesy. When she understood her words, she misunderstood her meaning.

She lifted the cover, and then she turned towards her guest. Madame de Mongelas was gazing out of window, watching with intensest interest a swallow that had got entangled in the broken branches of a tree over the way. Her whole frame was a-tingle with excitement. She bent forward, her eyes dilated, stretching out her hands as if she would help the bird in its efforts to struggle free. "Oh, you must save it," she said, "Oh, mon Dieu ! mon Dieu ! What a horror ! He will not do it. He cannot. Ah, save him, mademoiselle !"

"What is the matter ?" asked Suzanna tartly, standing dish-cover in hand.

"Oh, the bird yonder in the tree," cried madame, excitedly pointing. "Oh, how he

struggles. He makes pity to behold." She threw herself to and fro on her couch. "You must save him, mademoiselle," she repeated; "you must save him!"

"You do not expect me at my age, I presume," rejoined Suzanna, "to climb up to the top of that tree to deliver a bird. If you do, perhaps my rheumatism may excuse me, Madame de Mongelas." She spoke a little spitefully.

Madame de Mongelas barely heeded her. "No, not that," she said thoughtfully; "yet your nephew might. Oh, what a good idea! Call to him, mademoiselle; bid him to rush down immediately. Quick, quick; there is no time to lose. He will do it. He is brave, and he has a tender heart!"

"I shall certainly not send my nephew on any fresh wild-geese chase," said Suzanna very angrily. "He engages in enough already on his own account."

An ugly light flashed through the French-woman's eyes. "The bird is a swallow," she said. "Your nephew will never chase geese; he flies at higher game. Ah, if I had him here, I would *make* him go." She struck her hand on the window-sill as she said the word. Her eyes flashed strength and defiance. Then she quivered back among her cushions. "Oh, it is horrible!" she said. "I cannot support the seeing it. Ah, mademoiselle, you have a hard heart. Do you feel nothing for the poor little unfortunate?"

"I feel for men and women," said Suzanna. "I trust you always feel for them, Madame de Mongelas."

Madame de Mongelas had started up again. She had no thought for anything but the fluttering little existence away yonder, battling for its life. Suddenly she broke into what was almost a shriek of triumph. "I hear him," she cried, "in the

garden. Go to him, Mademoiselle Suze ! Call to him ! Ah, look at the little prisoner ! He is beginning to flutter again. Monsieur Arnout will rescue him."

"Peace, woman," said Suzanna in Dutch, setting her teeth hard.

The Frenchwoman half rose from her couch with a suppressed cry. Then, before Suzanna could realize her intention, she had thrown herself towards the window as best she could, painfully wrenching the already dislocated foot. Whatever one might think of her airs and graces, there was no doubt that this woman could bear bodily suffering. What cared she at the moment ? Her eyes were blazing with passion and fierce resolve.

"He shall save it !" she gasped.

But Suzanna was too quick for her. The old lady ran round to the window. "You shall not ask him," she said. "He would be

fool enough to attempt it. He shall not risk his precious life for such a trifle."

For a moment they faced each other. The grey Dutchwoman, erect and resolute, with one hand on the sash; the French beauty in her laces, supporting herself with difficulty against the window-curtains, her delicate features distorted with anger and pain.

They looked into each other's eyes. And each felt that here were powers well matched—eager fury and quiet strength. They recoiled from each other, as he pauses to test his armour who meets a foe worthy of his valour. They recoiled for one moment, each feeling it were best to turn back in time.

As they stood there, a frightened chirping from the captive found its way across the stillness. He lifted up his voice, as if knowing that succour was nigh.

Down in the garden a man's steps were heard pacing to and fro.

With a passionate blow Madame de Mongelas struck her clenched fist against the window-pane. Once. Twice. The glass came clattering down in great jagged fragments. She pressed her arm against what was left and thrust it out. Her hand was covered with blood.

"Madame, vous êtes fou," cried Suzanna, forgetting all her French in the indignation of the moment.

"Fou qui gagne!" shrieked the vicomtesse, hanging out among a fringe of broken pieces.

Arnout stood in the middle of a glittering garden path, looking up in amazement.

"Oh, Monsieur Arnold, the little bird yonder!" She pointed with her bleeding hand. "You must save him. Quick! He is killing himself."

He followed the direction she was indi-

cating. High up in the lofty leafage he could detect an agitated rustle. "But how can I save it?" he said, without removing his hands from his pockets; "I have no ladder."

"A ladder!" she laughed shrilly; "no, nor a stone staircase! Ciel! Does a man ask how, when there is a good deed to be done? The will finds itself wings. If I were a man, I would show you the way!"

Arnout looked up gloomily at the great tree rising before him into immeasurable blue. He had fled out into the garden, away from Jakob, away from the desperation of his own thoughts. He was in a mood for anything devil-may-care. Up yonder from the still, sunlit foliage broke renewed little agonised cries. Could he reach the dizzy spot? He was an athlete and a climber. And if he did not, there would be this great advantage: he would not fall, unless he

fell from the summit. He would not break his leg, but his head.

Miss Varelkamp's skinny neck came protruding from the other window. She had thrown up the sash. "Arnout," she cried in Dutch, "the creature is crazy. I forbid you—do you understand me—I forbid you to try!"

"And I," said Madame de Mongelas, who caught the meaning more from the accent than the words, "I have no right to forbid and no need to entreat. I have pointed out the duty, monsieur, and your aunt has pointed out the danger. *Faites.*"

"Here goes," said Arnout; and he swarmed up the tree.

The two women stood watching him, each at her window, in the warm sun-laden silence. He went up easily enough at first, up, up, his white flannels making little shining patches between the spreading branches.

Then he stopped, cautiously, and the watchers felt that the struggle was come. Then up again, very slowly, with long careful pauses and sudden decisions, away into green heights where they could hardly follow the line of his figure, then bending forward, and creeping softly, like some great caterpillar, along a mighty arch across the void. He was coming towards them; they could see him coiling round the brown line of the overhanging bough—far beneath him the glitter of the cruel gravel path.

“Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu !” gasped Madame de Mongelas. The words were not a prayer; they were a cry of exultation and passionate excitement. Suzanna neither spoke nor moved. In her bosom was a tumult of hope and of hate.

Arrived at the extremity of the bough Arnout once again hesitated. The distressed swallow hung caught in some broken twigs

above his head — but beyond his reach. Would the branch bear him, even if he could attain to it? The question of life or death lay there. He crept back again a little to a place on the great arm, on which he could lift himself erect. Then he stood up cautiously and stretched out his hand. The women watched him. Vain movement. The slender bough hung more than a yard beyond him.

Then suddenly he bent backwards and leaped—leaped into wide space, as a bird might break away—leaped at the frail foliage above him, caught at it, clutched it, and hung swaying to and fro, a white speck in immensity, while with one hand he seized at the swallow, whose rapid cries resounded through the air.

“Le brave!” said Madame de Mongelas softly. The bough bore him—at least for a moment—it bent like a bulrush under his weight, and, watching his opportunity as it

sank downwards, he let himself fall on to the larger branch beneath. As he loosened his hold, the fragile branch above him broke off near the stem, with a hissing crash that struck home into the hearts of the hearers. It hung limp and broken, its white wound showing against the weather-beaten trunk.

Arnout commenced his descent, with the fluttering bird in one hand, pressed lightly against his breast. The lookers-on breathed more freely, yet, in reality, had they known it, this part of the expedition, especially now one hand remained occupied, was in many ways the more dangerous of the two. There came a moment when Arnout, still some feet from the ground, slipped, stumbled, swayed forward——

In that flash of time—clear as distant lightning—all three realized that, if he let the bird go, his left hand could grasp at a branch near him. He did not move its position on

his breast. And with a dull thud he fell to the ground.

“Est-il possible ?” said Madame de Mongelas, white to the lips.

Suzanna was already on the stairs and in the garden and by her nephew’s side.

She bent down to lift up his head—oh, so tenderly!—but he opened his eyes immediately. He was only stunned and bruised, not seriously hurt.

“Thank you, tantetje,” he said dreamily, “it is nothing.”

Her manner changed immediately.

“Do not thank me, Arnout,” she answered ; “thank God that you are not in hell at this moment. I do not ask your thanks. I have seen to-day how you bestow them upon me. Go and claim those of the woman to amuse whom you venture your life.” And she left him.

Arnout got up slowly and shook himself.

And then he went upstairs, as his aunt had suggested, with the bird still clasped to his breast. Suzanna watched whether he would go, standing by the dining-room window, where she found Jakob, who had been a silent spectator of the whole scene.

Madame de Mongelas received her knight with great approbation, pouring praise enough into his ear to confound a more experienced warrior.

"A woman," she said, "in my nation—a nation of heroes—can do a man no greater honour than to look into his eyes and say, 'Vous êtes un brave.' I said it just now, involuntarily, when you sprang out into space. I repeat it, weighing my words. I am a woman like all others. And not because I am myself, but because I am a woman and you are a man, the words were well worth dying for."

He laid the frightened bird in her hand,

and as she strove to soothe it with the other, he noticed that she, too, was hurt.

“In the cause of suffering,” she said, “do you think we women dare do nothing? Ah, mon chevalier, danger is a beautiful thing!” She avoided his eyes as she said it. And presently she continued, in a lighter tone, “The creature is not injured. You have saved it from a horrible death. Tiens, l’ami!” She held out her beautiful arm towards the broken window and opened her hand. The bird lay in it for a second, half frightened still. Then he spread out his wings and flew away.

“To France,” she said, looking dreamily after him, “and tell them that the sun shines everywhere, and that wherever he shines, the birds build up their nests.”

“I risked my life to get him for you,” said Arnout in an injured voice.

She turned on him in surprise. “Not

that," she said. "You risked your life to save him from the most terrible of deaths. And I knew that you would risk it, because you are as brave as you are strong."

"I risked it for your sake," he said still moodily. "I don't care for birds."

"But I do," she answered quickly, "and I do not believe you. And I restored him the liberty which is his by right."

"Liberty!" he repeated bitterly. "What do you know of liberty, madame? You only know the tyrant and the slave."

"No gallantries!" she said, laughing. "You have not yet learnt how to say them. It is true that men know little of liberty. It is a privilege of the brutes. We human beings have the higher happiness of surrender, which is love. But I——?" She paused. "Get me some water to wash the blood from my hand," she said.

And he obeyed her.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE DANGER OF BEAUTY.

IN the meantime the unfortunate pigeon lay greasing over in its sauce.

Arnout saw it there when he came back with the water, and he advised madame to commence her neglected lunch. "Oh, but I cannot," cried that lady, whose interest in the live bird had caused her altogether to overlook the dead one. "It is Friday to-day, my jour maigre ; I cannot eat meat to-day."

Arnout stared in astonishment. "But I thought you said you didn't care about the priests," he said, "and that they were all commission-agents for places in heaven, and that sort of thing."

“That is possible,” she answered quietly, “but that has nothing to do with ‘meagre days.’ It would be very unlucky for me to eat meat on Fridays. And perhaps my foot would not get well. I am so sorry,” she continued, as he stood irresolute; “I told your aunt expressly that I was not hungry, and would prefer an egg. For I thought you Huguenots would not understand about fasting. *Vrai, monsieur*, I must say it. You Huguenots have no religion. You do nothing. *Débarrass* me of my pigeon, I implore you. Eat it; it will do you no harm, I suppose. The holy Peter pays no attention to your doings; you have an easy time of it—on earth.”

She added the two words very maliciously, and looked askance at him, and grinned—if beauty can grin.

“Do you believe this—thing?” said Arnout.

"You are an infidel and do not understand. It is most annoying. Your aunt is angry enough with me already. Tell her, for Heaven's sake, that I have eaten her dainty."

"A second lie," said Arnout. "Are lies no harm?"

"What do you mean, *mon cher*?" She opened her big eyes wide. "You are very rude," she said.

"You won't eat meat," he continued, "but you don't mind telling lies about it."

"But you don't understand," she answered. "You do not understand at all. *L'un serait un péché, l'autre est une politesse.* There is no other difference than that."

"I am much obliged to you for telling me, *madame*," said Arnout gravely, as he walked out of the room.

His mind was in a ferment. The morning

had been rich in changes of sentiment. He recalled his aunt's refutation of Betje's ridiculous charge, and the subsequent scene in which Madame de Mongelas had treated him like a child. Then, later on, had come the conversation with Jakob which had stirred up all the latent discontent of his heart. And a few minutes after that, he had faced death for a trifle, an idea—he himself hardly knew what. Why should he not face death? What did it matter?

It was unnatural that he, with his healthy enjoyment of life, should put such a question. If he did so momentarily, it must be because he was passing from one phase into another, and the confusion of the moment overmastered him. It is when we sink lowest into despair that we leap highest towards new hope. And when the stream of life stagnates for a moment, we cry, beneath its bursting pressure, that it were better still.

But often, almost before the words have left our lips, it is leaping away again, perhaps beyond its proper bounds, but with fresh strength from the brief delay. Would Arnout Oostrum's life turn to the right? The answer at that moment hardly lay with him. It seemed to him as if his whole existence was breaking loose from its former well-appointed little channel. The world was much larger, life was much fuller, than he had ever thought. Beyond his little circle loomed in a new horizon—delightful in the haze—the fair world of Paris and things Parisian. For many months he had been wandering away from the neat grooves of his aunt's theology, but he had met with nothing to replace that which was escaping his grasp. Madame de Mongelas found the garden prepared in which to sow the seeds of her easy-going philosophy of contempt. "Nothing is worth admiring or suffering for.

Enjoyment, though unattainable, is the end of existence. A wise man tolerates all opinions and reverences none."

How easy it would all be, if only we had no passions. Nowadays we might manage to settle with our consciences. But our passions spoil the game — like breaths of wind against a house of cards.

He had fled from Jakob in great wrath with himself. No moment could have been better chosen to tempt him to reckless adventure. And when, still fresh from the struggle and the danger, he brought his trophy to the beautiful Frenchwoman and was rewarded by her smile, he realised in the sudden revulsion of feeling, as he had never done before, how great had become her influence over him. The discovery did not in any way startle or distress him. Madame de Mongelas was too brief an episode in his life. In a few days

she would be gone out of it for ever, and the very last thing she would remember with anything approaching interest would be the student of theology, Arnout Oostrum.

He smiled to himself at the thought, and suddenly—for so doth one change of mood beget another—there broke across his heart a wave of recognition of good, pure, sweet Dorothy Donselaar.

A few days ago he had asked Dorothy to be his wife—some day. He had done so partly, perhaps, from a chivalrous desire to uplift her once for all above his Aunt Barsselius's vulgar banter. It was a very good thing, all the same, and a very sensible one, to have done. Of course he had done it. He loved Dorothy Donselaar.

He told himself several times that day, with eager repetition, that he loved Dorothy Donselaar.

"But she goes to-morrow, Jakob," said Meuffrouw Varelkamp.

"Where to?" asked Jakob dryly.

"To the inn, or the poorhouse, or 'where the pepper grows.'"

"Or Mevrouw Barsselius's?" suggested Jakob. For a pious young man and a minister he had a wonderful little weakness for teasing.

"Or my sister Barsselius's," assented Suzanna.

"Who will make her almost as comfortable as you have done, Miss Suzanna."

"My sister Barsselius has a large house and two servants. These things do not, in themselves, insure the airing of the beds. It is the eye of the mistress which does that. But I have nothing to say with regard to my sister Barsselius's household arrangements."

"And you are going to pass Madame de

Mongelas on to her after all? She will be glad of that."

"Do *you* want her to remain here, Dominé?"

"No," said Jakob; "but, when she leaves, I want her to go for good and all. That will be, I suppose, in a day or two. It seems to me that Mevrouw Barsselius, if she once gets her, will keep her for ever. And I don't want Arnout to pity her. I want him to think you are the injured party, not she."

"Good heavens, Jakob," said Suzanna indignantly but anxiously, "you don't mean to tell me you think Arnout need be considered in the matter! Arnout has nothing to do with Madame de Mongelas."

"Dear Juffrouw, I did not say he had."

"A Frenchwoman—a papist—a woman* of rank—a woman of fashion," cried Suzanna, heaping up the list with unnecessary vehemence. "She would like to see him try it

on my son. Let him make love to little Dorothy. I am afraid you have not much experience of the world, Jakob."

"No, Juffrouw; but I am willing to learn," answered Jakob humbly. He pitied her too sincerely to point out that it was not he who had suggested the possibilities which aroused her indignation.

"The idea is absurd," continued Suzanna angrily. "You are as bad as Betje. You have very mistaken ideas of my Arnout. Nobody knows the boy as well as I do. I have watched him day by day for fifteen years. He is the very soul of honour."

"That he is," said the minister warmly.

"Go away now. You are a worthy man, Jakob. But I want you to go away."

"Like Madame de Mongelas," said Jakob. "I hope that she is as anxious to please you as I always shall be." And he took up his clerical hat and limped off.

“I have watched him and worked for him and been a mother to him for the last fifteen years,” said Suzanna to herself, as she resumed her seat in her faded old green-cushioned chair, “and when it comes to choosing between my commands and a pretty stranger’s caprice, he chooses the stranger. ’Tis not Madame de Mongelas, ’tis the pretty face; any other would do as well, as long as it is a lady. I knew he wouldn’t stoop to ruining my kitchen-girl. I know Arnout, inside and outside, like an old glove. Who should know him better than I?”

She took up her knitting and made a few stitches. Presently she dropped one. She made half a dozen more, and then she dropped another. What was this? She had not dropped a stitch in her knitting for years.

She laid it down, and sat looking out of

the window, without seeing anything. "It is in the blood," she said, "and he must marry Dorothy—the sooner the better."

She was trying to deceive herself, as she had tried to deceive Jakob; but she was utterly unconscious of any attempt at deceit. It was true that she did not fear any serious complication between her nephew and the foreigner—from Arnout's side the thing seemed impossible, from the vicomtesse's ridiculous; but she was vaguely anxious all the same, and she was intensely mortified, insulted, and hurt in the very lowest depth of her deep nature by the humiliation to which Arnout had subjected her. She hated her triumphant rival for it; the very "rivalry" was a pain beyond endurance.

She hated the woman. And presently, in her unerring truthfulness, she confessed it to herself. "My God," she whispered, folding her hands upon her lap, "have mercy

upon me ! I hate her. Can I still hate after more than thirty years ? Do all the prayers and victories go for nothing, and does one feel at sixty all the misery and the wickedness of twenty-five ? I know the feeling ; none better than I. I hate her. Had he fallen from the summit, I would have killed her where she stood. I would have killed her. Oh, my God, my God ! ”

She sat on through the hours unheeding.

Upstairs a light voice was practising yet lighter songs to the notes of a guitar. “ *Ce n'est pas un homme ; c'est un amour !* ”

“ It's time the French madame had her bouillon, if you'll get out the rusks,” remarked Betje, walking into the room after her second ineffectual knock.

“ And the only way to get rid of her,” said Suzanna, waking as it were from a dream, “ is to keep her in the house for a few days longer, at any rate.”



CHAPTER XVII.

SUZANNA'S VICTORIES.

BETJE returned from upstairs with an empty cup and a three-cornered note.

“She kept me waiting while she wrote it,” said Betje, with an aggrieved air, “and you don’t tell me she didn’t understand me when I told her that my ‘cookies’ were on the fire.”

Suzanna took the dainty little epistle. Its heavy perfume sickened her. She had never seen perfumed paper before, and she had a vague idea it must be an invention of the evil one, to cloud the brains of young simpletons or to drown the smell of brimstone, perhaps.

Madame de Mongelas wrote, in a round French hand—

“DEAR MADEMOISELLE,

“Will you forgive me if I ask you to come up to me for one moment? It is a favour, but you have accustomed me to favours, until perhaps you will think I grow indiscreet.

“VICOMTESSE DE MONGELAS.”

“Best were never to see her again,” thought Suzanna, as the paper fell on her lap. “She will make a fool of me if I go.”

“Well,” said Betje, “my dinner is spoilt in any case. I may as well take up your answer, Juffrouw.”

“There is no answer,” replied Suzanna. “Go back to your kitchen.”

Betje looked at her mistress attentively, shook her head thoughtfully, and marched out of the room.

"I must be very kind to her," said Suzanna to herself. "I dislike her, and unless I am very kind indeed, I am sure to be unjust." And she went upstairs and knocked at Madame de Mongelas's door.

The vicomtesse half lifted herself from the cushions to welcome her hostess. With a superb movement of entreaty she held out her hand.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "I have to confess that I was wrong, and to beg your pardon. I acted under the moment's impression of compassion, and I forgot that what I was endangering was not mine to risk, but yours."

Suzanna was least of all prepared for this. She did not believe about the compassion, and therein she wronged Madame de Mongelas.

"You have this reason to forgive me," the latter continued, "that I have proved to you

—once again—that your nephew is a perfect ‘galant homme,’ and a noble heart.”

This graceful little speech was unfortunate.

“My nephew, madame,” said Suzanna tartly, in the best French she could muster, “is a student of theology, and should be left in peace to continue his studies.”

Madame de Mongelas coloured. “Let us understand each other,” she said calmly. “My presence here is disagreeable to you. I have not outstayed my welcome, but I have abused your hospitality. So be it. If you will kindly allow me to remain one night longer, I think I can manage to leave this house to-morrow. I shall always be most truly grateful to you for the extreme kindness you have shown me, mademoiselle.”

“And you will go to Mevrouw Barsselius,” said Suzanna bitterly. Oh, the false, the seductive woman! She found her self-

imposed duty of amiability beyond her strength.

Madame de Mongelas smiled. "Ah, how I understand you!" she said. "No, I will not take refuge with your sister. I will fly for good and all. The wicked fairy shall disappear from the scene. Where? Ciel, do I know? An inn—anywhere—where the horrid witches go to. But I have not bewitched your nephew, mademoiselle. He is a noble young fellow. And we must take care that we do not spoil him, neither I nor you."

"You had better stay," said Suzanna.

"Do you not want me to go?"

"Yes; and that is why I wish you to stay."

"Let us consider, then, neither your preference nor my convenience, but your nephew's welfare. Let us avoid, in the first place, mademoiselle, any semblance of an

unpleasantness between you and me. The doctor comes to-morrow. I will ask him to say I can be moved on Monday, and I will go to the Catholic Infirmary at Utrecht. Send the boy away in the meantime, if you can, and if you deem it advisable."

Suzanna felt her heart softening somewhat towards the stranger.

"You wrong me," continued Madame de Mongelas, turning her limpid eyes towards Suzanna, "and you wrong your good nephew yet more. You are afraid of ghosts. But you pay me a pretty compliment also, and all women enjoy a compliment from their own sex. Et après—que voulez-vous? One can understand. Vous êtes sa mère." Suzanna knew herself utterly humbled and ashamed.

"I repeat. He is a noble young fellow, and I admire him. I wish him well with all my heart. And if the doctor will let me, I will go quietly on Monday, and we will tell

your friends in the village that the air was better for me in the town."

"You are a better woman than I thought you, madame," said Suzanna bluntly, and then she slunk away.

The vicomtesse laughed drearily over the compliment. "I have done what I could," she said to herself. "Le bon Dieu can expect no more of me." She took up her novel again. "How tiresome they are, these eternal complications! As if there were not adulteries enough in real life!"

Suzanna returned to her knitting calmer in heart and more confused in head than when she went upstairs. And now she blundered on to her own defeat.

Arnout and she had to meet at their five-o'clock dinner. Arnout was very penitent. He could not confess to any wrong-doing, yet he felt that he had caused the dear old

woman the deepest pain, and he strove to show her he was sorry for it. She, on her side, realising that, if he were called upon to choose again, he would repeat his choice of the morning, she knew not how to receive his advances. They grew silent and uncomfortable in each other's presence. They had had numerous difficulties before, born out of passing circumstances, and tending towards a foregone conclusion. They had never known separation like this, arising out of an estrangement of hearts.

"Arnout," said Suzanna bluntly, when the meal was over, "I think you had better go back to Overstad to-morrow. You have been here quite long enough."

"But term is drawing to a close, aunt," said Arnout, "and, besides, I can work much better at home."

"Do not lie to me," said Suzanna. "It is Madame de Mongelas who amuses you."

“Certainly she amuses me, tantetje. She is very amusing.”

“The more reason for you to go. I shall not ask you anything again to-day, Arnout, after this morning. But this is my opinion, and I give it for what it is worth; you owe it to the woman who has your plighted troth, you owe it to the God whose servant you are preparing to become, to leave this house.”

“Oh, if you put it like that, Tante Suze,” said Arnout, with a shrug of his shoulders, “I will go to-morrow morning.”

“I have gained the victory more easily than I had dared to hope,” thought Suzanna. “His heart is in the right place—if only you know how to manage him. And he is very fond of me, after all.”

“Yes, she is a very dangerous woman,” said Arnout to himself; “no wonder Tante Suze is afraid of her. And no wonder I am

a little smitten by her charms, as I undoubtedly am. Even dear old Tante Suze sees it. It is a fortunate thing I am as good as engaged to Dorothy. But Tante is right I had much better go."





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PURSUIT OF VICE.

THAT evening, at nine o' the clock, the virtuous Betje, having washed up the dinner things and put on her second-best shawl, went out in search of the most beautiful and most miserable thing on earth. She found it exactly where she said she had expected to find it. Nevertheless it must be admitted, between you and me, that if she knew the right spot to look in, she "went for it" in the most unworkmanlike manner. It was probably out of pure goodness of heart, and not to put too early a stop to even a reprehensible amusement, that she first scrambled through impassable bushes and tore a great

hole in her shawl (the second-best), and lost her way, and fell into a dry ditch, and sat down unexpectedly in a puddle. Perhaps she liked puddles. Perhaps she liked the pursuit of virtue under difficulties. She certainly liked the pursuit—and capture red-handed—of vice.

Sweet vice was sitting on a rustic bench in the woods, lost among the soft shadows of the summer night. She was dreaming of things strangely and wildly lovely, of things that are not, except in her fierce fancy or her sorrowful regret, and the reality of ruin and shame, of rags and famine, stood behind her—out of sight.

Upon her descended Betje with righteous indignation, increased by every moment of delay and every experience of mischance, and she smote her where she sat lost in delicious bewilderment, smote her on a cheek on which the kisses yet lay wet.

"D—n!" cried the youth with a tremendous oath, as he started to his feet.

The wounded damsel gave a simultaneous cry of pain.

"Ay, and the two of you!" cried Betje; "and a whole bushel of you! I'm not afraid of you! Come on!"

She struck an attitude of defiance, her bony arms well to the front. For virtue, in this case, was stout and strong, as it might be wished she always were.

The guilty pair whom she had disturbed were, however, by no means minded to assault her. One of them, in fact—the Adam—remembered that the woods were dark, and whisked round a corner. Whereupon Eve lifted up her voice and wept.

But the avenger was too quick for him. In a moment she had his head well under her arm and was dragging him back to the scene of his triumphs and his discomfiture.

She pulled up his head to the dim light in spite of his struggles. And then, when she recognised him, she let him go, and fell back a pace in surprise.

“Mynheer Karel!” she said in tragedy tones of wrath and indignation.

She had believed she was dealing with some young groom or shop-boy. Betje had the deepest respect for the gentry, even when they went astray. She was a good deal taken aback by the unexpected discovery. But it increased her anger against the unfortunate little maid.

“And you’ll be telling me, I suppose,” she cried, turning on the latter, “that it’s marriage you mean! Oh .yes, of course, Mevrouw.* And has Mevrouw any further

* The married women of the lower and lower-middle classes do not take the style of “Mevrouw” in Holland. There are three degrees—Mevrouw, Juffrouw, and Vrouw. Juffrouw is also applied to all unmarried women, except those of the higher class, who are called “Freule.”

orders to give? Lord-a-mercy on us, to think what a whipping I should give you if you were a daughter of mine!"

"Be quiet, you brute!" said Karel van Donselaar fiercely. Having recovered somewhat from his shaking, he felt it was time he should do something. He fumbled in his pocket, produced a rix-dollar, and held it out towards the priestess of virtue.

She took it and quietly slipped it out of sight. "That won't buy me a new shawl," she said coolly, "but it'll go some way towards it. A fool and his money are soon parted, if you'll forgive my saying so, Mynheer van Donselaar; but no amount of rix-dollars will keep me from doing my duty to your worthy father, sir."

"Good heavens!" cried the young libertine in a real funk, "you don't mean to make us unhappy. My good woman, I assure you, you are utterly mistaken in your suspicions.

No harm was intended and no harm has been done. I'll never speak to the poor little thing again, if her friends don't approve of it. Good-bye, Cornélie!"

Whereupon Eve, driven forth from her little Paradise, once more lifted up her voice and wept.

"Hold your tongue — slattern!" cried Betje, "and be thankful on your bended knees if an angel has stopped you in the way. We shall see what Mejuffrouw Varelkamp has to say to your harmless evening amusements. But you, mynheer, unless you want me to speak to your father this evening, you come along quietly with me."

"Come along with you?" said Karel in amazement; "I'll be dashed if I do. What for? Where to?"

"You come along with me," repeated Betje obstinately. "I don't know how to manage young gentlemen like you, and we

must find out those who do. As for the girl, leave her to me and Mejuffrouw."

"I won't budge a step," answered Karel, "unless you promise to keep the matter from my father and from everybody else."

"Except one person who won't betray you," said Betje. "Done. But you won't keep your foot from stumbling, young sir, if you walk in the dark lanes like this."

"I'm glad there's no moon," replied Karel, who was always practical. And, the terms being agreed on, they started.

Once only Karel broke the silence, as they groped their way back through the little wood. "But what, in Heaven's name, do you want with us?" he asked.

"I want your souls," said Betje, with a snap.

"Then it seems to me, at any rate, that you might leave our bodies alone," growled young Donselaar.

But she clutched at his arm, as if he were trying to escape.

Arrived at the high-road, they had but a few paces left before reaching the cottage. Ordering Keetje to follow at a little distance, the high-handed avenger whisked the young gentleman into her kitchen and locked him in. Then she went in search of Arnout, whom she found packing his portmanteau. "Jongeheer," she began breathlessly, "that minx, Keetje, has been making love to Mynheer van Donselaar. I caught them at it in the woods. He's in the kitchen. You must tell him not to do it. Tell him all about how wicked it is, and how stupid, and that you never do it. Here is the key."

And she was gone. She found that, in the meantime, Keetje had run off to her mother's, and so she ran after her.

Arnout stood staring at the key she had left on the table. "A pleasant little pig to

wash," he said, using a familiar Dutch expression, "*No*, thank you." And then he said, "Dorothy's brother," and went slowly downstairs. He turned the key in the lock very hesitatingly, and walked into the bright bare kitchen. Karel van Donselaar sat huddled up under the flaring gaslight.

"Oostrum," he said, starting up, "don't preach to me. I won't stand it. You're not a parson yet." He evidently wanted to brave the matter out.

Said Arnout: "My dear fellow, I don't want to preach to anybody. I know nothing about the business at all."

"Oh!" replied Karel, catching at a straw. "I was only joking, you know. 'Theol. Stud.' and all that. I have a note for you from my father somewhere," and he began fumbling in his coat-pocket. "There was nobody about, so I just stepped into the kitchen."

“Through the keyhole?” said Arnout. He could not bear the other’s lying ways. “Karel, what is this about you and my aunt’s little maid?”

Donselaar dropped his hand from his pocket. “Then you do know,” he said. “It’s no business of yours.”

“Yes, it is. Or rather, she is. You’ve no business to meddle with her.”

“Oho, is that it?” said Karel with a leer. “Well, I’ve as good a right as you, any day. Why didn’t you manage to keep her? You’re too stingy, I fancy. Girls like that want presents, and plenty of them.”

Arnout had been utterly at a loss how to approach the subject. His young friend smoothed the way for him.

“What do you mean, you cad?” he burst out in a towering rage. “Do you think that everybody else is as dirty a scoundrel as you are? I touch the wretched little creature—

I——” He could get no further. Young Arnout had a fine fountain of temper, if only you touched the proper spring.

“Tut-tut,” said Karel, half frightened. “She told me you had been her first lover. I can’t help it if the little puss tells lies.”

“I haven’t looked at her since she was a baby,” said Arnout; “and, mind you, Donselaar, this is a case of ‘hands off.’ The sooner you understand that the better. You must give me your word of honour that you will never speak to the poor child again.”

“Don’t you wish you may get it?” said Donselaar.

“I am not going to preach to you,” continued Arnout; “God knows I am both unfit and unwilling to preach. But I tell you plainly this thing that you are doing is a low thing, a cruel thing. Are there not women enough in the cities of whom you can ask

whatsoever you want? This girl's whole existence is in your hands. Only a coward would crush it."

"She should have thought of that before," said Karel. "I didn't ask her to go further than she chose."

"I don't care how far you've gone," cried Oostrum; "but here you stop. Do you understand me? Give me your word."

"No," said Karel sulkily.

Arnout did not answer immediately. He walked calmly towards the door of the pantry, against which hung a couple of Spanish canes, such as are used for beating out door-mats.

"Look here," he said, "I'm stronger than you, of course, Donselaar, and I don't want to abuse my strength; but all I say is, you'd better make up your mind to pass me your word of honour to leave Keetje untouched henceforth, before that clock strikes ten.

You won't leave this kitchen till you've done it, and you might find yourself the worse for the delay." It wanted five minutes to the hour. Three minutes passed of unbroken silence. Arnout was gazing speculatively at the pantry door; Karel's eyes were fixed on his boots.

Then said Karel in a dull voice, "I give you my word. *I* don't want to touch the little beast."

"It is like you," said Arnout indignantly, "first to injure the poor thing and then to insult her. Never mind. *That* is settled. But I warn you, van Donselaar, if ever I find you up to any of these tricks again, I tell Dominé te Bakel, and the Dominé tells your father."

"Tell, tell," sneered Karel.

"Yes, I tell," answered Arnout composedly. "Oh, Donselaar," he went on with a sudden change of voice, "I'm not going to preach.

But, now we are here as men together, think—just think for one moment—of the misery it means for that poor thing! Ruin—and what ruin! Don't do it. Don't do it. Think of your own sister."

"Let me out," said Karel.

"I'm going to. Good night."

Karel stopped as he was passing through the door. "I *have* got a letter for you from 'the old un,'" he said; "I don't always tell lies, you see. Here it is." He held out a square envelope by the tips of his fingers. Arnout took it, and they separated without another word.

"And why should the poor child not have her little diversions, as long as she takes them innocently?" cried Keetje's mother, the old lodge-woman. She looked at Betje, and she spoke to Betje. But her remarks were intended for Miss Varelkamp. Keetje

stood by, her giddy curls all lank. She cheered up a little when this unexpected view of the case was presented to her. "Is it to be all work and no play?" continued the portress. "I suppose you want the child to darn your clothes all night as well as to run your errands all day."

"I?" cried Betje, horrified at the idea. "I wouldn't have her touch my things. You can do as you like, for all I care, Vrouw Janssen. If you're in such a hurry to have grandchildren that bear your name, it's the Juffrouw's business, not mine."

"Mejuffrouw," said Vrouw Janssen, appealing to her child's mistress, "strike me dead if there's a word of truth in what she says. Ask the child herself if she's ever done anything worse than stop to exchange a few words with the gentleman. She can't help it if people find her pleasing. There's those that never had the chance of knowing how it feels."

“Stop to exchange a few words with the gentleman,” sobbed Cornelia. “Can’t help it if people find her pleasing.”

“Silence, child!” said Miss Varelkamp sternly.

“And let those,” cried the mother, “that never sinned themselves cast the first stone at her.”

“Then I’ll do it, and willing,” interrupted Betje. “I’ve never had a kiss from a man since my father died and I a babe unborn.”

“Ah,” said the old portress, wagging her head, “the men know what’s what. It’s no fault of yours, mejuffer, I’ll be bound, but it’s ill fishing without a bait.”

“Silence,” said Miss Varelkamp again with great stateliness. “The girl can go, and there’s no more to be said about it. I will pay her her week’s wages, and she can bring me back her aprons. Considering the cir-

cumstances, I will make no deduction for that hole she burned in one of them last Tuesday, as I had threatened to do."

"Go!" cried the portress with uplifted hands. "For an innocent 'How-d'ye-do?' to a gentleman she has known as a baby! You'll think better of it, I am certain, dear Juffrouw——"

"She can go," interrupted Miss Varelkamp, "and there's an end of it. I will keep no woman in my house for an hour—nor no man either—against whose morality such a charge as this can be rightfully brought. Let them find their fit surroundings elsewhere, but this is no place for them."

"Do you mean that—now really?" persisted the portress.

"I always mean what I say."

"Then Lord-a-mercy on you and forgive you your own shortcomings, if you've any, Juffrouw. And I say for one that it's true

enough, as I've heard tell, that there's three kinds of human creatures in the world—men, and women, *and* old maids; and there were no old maids before the Fall."

"No," slapped in Betje smartly, "or they'd have told Eve to mind her appetites."

"God Almighty must decide for the other side," said Juffrouw Varelkamp very solemnly, as she rose and walked towards the door, "but it's the one sin for which there's no forgiveness on earth, Vrouw Janssen. I am sorry you are not a better girl, Keetje, and I'm sure I wish you well. I'll give you a whole extra florin, if you'll promise me not to wear your pony hair again."

"We don't want your florins," cried the irate mother, "and if the girl comes to the street, it'll be through your virtue, Miss Varelkamp. Curse your virtue, says I." And she dragged Keetje away from the too carefully white-washed little house.

"It was very dreadful, Betje," said Miss Varelkamp, wiping her pale forehead, "but I'm sure I did right. Once that sort of thing is in a man or woman, there's no hope for them. The girl is unredeemably lost. I pity her, after a manner; but from the moment we make a concession *here*, we—sink—to—the—level—of—the—brutes."

"The sins of the fathers——" began Betje, much impressed by her mistress's solemn manner. But Juffrouw Varelkamp had no patience to listen just now.

"And who was the guilty man, Betje?" she asked with unbecoming eagerness.

"Please, Juffrouw," replied Betje, "I should like to tell you very much. But I daren't. I promised not to."

"Oh, of course, if you promised not to," said Suzanna quickly.

"I shouldn't mind so much, only he

gave me a rix-dollar towards mending my shawl. So you see I can't break my word, Juffrouw."

"I see," said Suzanna.





CHAPTER XIX.

ARNOUT'S PORTMANTEAU REMAINS UNPACKED.

“MYNHEER,

“My daughter 'has informed me, upon her return from Overstad, that you took advantage of her position as a guest of your aunt Barsselius to make her an offer of marriage. Although I understand that you did not press for an immediate reply, I consider it more expedient not to delay a decision which requires no further postponement. I beg therefore to inform you, in my daughter's name and my own, that it is impossible for us—either now or at any future period—to entertain your proposal. You are not, and you will never become,

a fit match for Miss van Donselaar. Had you not been conscious of this yourself, you would certainly have communicated with me, instead of with her. I may add, with an eye to the delay you suggested, that my health is excellent, and that, even were it not so, I should be able to rely upon my testamentary arrangements and my daughter's filial affection.

"I remain, yours, etc.,

"DIEDERIK VAN DONSELAAR.

"Steenevest, Friday morning, 11.30."

Young Arnout sat in his sky-loft and this letter lay on the table in front of him. He had given up his room downstairs, by-the-by, to make a little sitting-room for Madame de Mongelas.

The contents of the letter had fallen upon him like a thunderbolt. The comparison is trite, but true — always presuming the

thunderbolt to be a little one. The heaven of his hope had seemed, not preternaturally blue, but calm and unclouded ; and the sun, as he thought, had not shown itself unfriendly. So that he was not prepared for the deluge.

He was not vainer than most young men of twenty. He might almost have been called modest, considering that he must have known—at least in part—what havoc his yellow locks and honest blue eyes had made in the hearts of the young beauties of the village. He knew that people liked him, and he liked them in return. Stern papas and mammas were kind to him, not because he was a good “parti,” but because he was an upright, manly young fellow, with a pleasant smile and a courteous word for the oldest and the ugliest. There was not a young man in the whole province who had learned courtesy in so excellent a school as Arnout Oostrum. And in these days, when the

rising generation mistake politeness for affectation, the old people dearly enjoyed those old-fashioned "égards" which Arnout had learned from Mejuffrouw Suzanna.

So he was accustomed to being treated with benevolence. Even pompous old Mynheer van Donselaar had never been especially disagreeable to him, which was saying a good deal. Mynheer van Donselaar had hitherto enjoyed that tranquil blindness which only full-blown self-conceit can bestow. It had never entered into his head that Miss Varelkamp's boy—nonage, nothing and nobody—would aspire to the hand of Miss Dorothea van Donselaar.

And, strange to say, Miss Varelkamp, looking at the subject from her point of view, had always considered the match the most natural thing in the world. So had more people in the village; but, then, people of the village did not speak of such matters to

Mynheer van Donselaar. Mevrouw Bars selius had set her heart on the arrangement—regarding it chiefly as a pecuniary transaction—and Arnout had come to think it a very desirable one. He had considered he was acting, if anything, rather handsomely when he vindicated Dorothy's honour before his aunt. He had fancied that she appreciated his magnanimity. He had clung in these last days with growing earnestness, almost anxiety, to her steadfast affection—and now——

“‘Had you not been conscious yourself that you are not and never can become a fit match for Miss van Donselaar——’” He coloured over his ears, alone in the bare little room.

“‘My health is excellent, and, even were it not so——’” He started up with a muttered something that sounded very like an oath. “Dorothy must repeat that sentence to me,”

he thought, "and if she does, then——" He could not himself have filled up the blank. Chaos unutterable!

In the first place, then, he must see Dorothy. Unfortunately he had made an enemy of her brother only half an hour ago. He could not help that. He went downstairs to tell his aunt Suzanna that he could not leave Overstad before to-morrow evening.

As he passed the viscountess's open door, she called to him. "We will read no more naughty books," she said, "but when the post comes in presently you must bring me up my *Figaro*, and I will sing for you your favourite 'Robert, toi que j'aime.' You are very démodé to have such a favourite. But come up early, child, for I feel lonely to-night."

Madame's nightly pleasure was the arrival of her *Figaro*. She rejoiced over it with great rejoicing. She received but few letters ;

they were sent on to her from the Overstad Poste Restante.

“Tante,” said Arnout to Suzanna, “I cannot leave for Overstad before to-morrow evening.”

“Indeed!” answered Suzanna, knitting away as if for very life. She disdained to ask his reason. Her heart told her that she knew it. She had been up to Madame de Mongelas a few moments before with a cup of tea, and she had told that lady, not without a certain admixture of spite, that her nephew was going to return to his studies. The Frenchwoman, accustomed to distinguish small shades of expression, had answered very quickly that she regretted his departure, for that Monsieur Arnout was truly charming, but her very reticence had sent Miss Suzanna downstairs with the conviction that she would keep him if she could.

“Did you look in on Madame de Mongelas

on your way downstairs?" asked Miss Suzanna artlessly. "Do you know if she wants anything?"

"She asked for her paper," replied Arnout. "It must have come. It is very late, nearly half-past ten."

"A nice conclusion to a well-spent day," said Suzanna bitterly. "There, take it to her, do. It is on the table. Jakob te Bakel tells me it is full of dirty things. Read it together."

Arnout stood near his aunt. He could not understand her manner. It made him very uncomfortable. And this night of all others he had need of affection. He bent down and took her hand timidly to lift it to his lips. She withdrew it hastily.

"Leave me," she said in her harsh voice. "Good night."

Her tone offended him, and he ran up angrily to Madame de Mongelas.

“Good boy!” said that lady, with a sunny smile. “I will sing to you first, to reward you. We have still half an hour before your aunt’s bedtime. Do you know that you good people go to sleep just when the great world of Paris, the real world, is waking up? Allons. ‘Robert, toi que j’aime.’ It makes me feel fifty at the very least.”

She sang divinely—or so it seemed to him. Never before had he heard such a passion of tears in a human voice. He forgot his troubles as he listened. When the last words had died away, he felt how stupid would be any adjective he could command, and so he merely stammered that there must be other verses yet.

She cast a radiant glance of approval at him and sang the whole air over again. “Do you know,” she said, “that you are delicious? I have been made love to a hundred times—how can we help it, nous autres femmes?—

but I have never been admired for the sake of admiration only. You are a revelation to me, mon petit chevalier, of a something in woman I did not know existed before. Do you understand me?"

"No," he said, troubled in the very depth of his heart.

"That is why you are delicious," she answered softly. "Never understand me. Why are you not a Catholic? You would have comprehended the Madonna. Shall I sing you one song more?"

Miss Varelkamp sat in the room downstairs. She knitted fast by the light of her white china petroleum lamp. She did not even pause to catch one of her natural enemies, a moth that was fluttering round and round the green shade. Betje had come in and laid down on the table her slate with the list of the day's expenses and the odd

cents that were left. That was always the signal for Miss Varelkamp to open her Bible and read the nightly chapter. Miss Varelkamp had not looked up.

She knitted yet faster. Once or twice, at long intervals, a tear rolled leisurely down her yellow cheek. Then she winked her eyelid very rapidly a number of times, but she never stopped her knitting.

Her thoughts were of Arnout. She was jealous, so be it. But she was deeply hurt and deeply sorrowful. She told herself that she could have given him up to Dorothy—she would show that she could do that—or to any other woman whom he loved. But there could not be a question of even a passing “enticement” for this Frenchwoman. Only a few hours ago the boy had repeatedly spoken of his engagement to Dorothy. It was merely the viscountess’s grace and her beautiful singing and her knowledge of the

world that delighted him. And because he enjoyed these, and because she amused him, he cast every wish of his aunt's to the wind. Her heart trembled for the boy. He was worldly; he loved the world and its pleasures. He was fleshly; only that morning he had courted death in fun. He was weak; a woman's smile could rule him, even when he cared not for the woman.

This trouble was not a new one to Suzanna. For the last year or two it had been growing upon her, as she anxiously watched Arnout's career at the University. Many times she had compared him to Jakob te Bakel with a sinking heart. His soul! his soul! She, the strong woman, born to act, eager to do something, imperious to impose her will—she felt her powerlessness here. And she struck her impotent yearnings against the rocks until they fell bleeding to the ground. From hope deferred, from prayer unanswered, she

rebelled against the silent Deity. And unconsciously, while she vainly demanded that her nephew might learn to love Him, the hate of God invaded her heart.

“I am very wicked,” she repeated to herself this evening. “I wrong Madame de Mongelas, and I know that I do so. She herself has told me that I wrong my own nephew, and she has offered to go of her own account. I am most unjust to them; I am a selfish, wicked old woman. I have loved him through all these years, but it has always been for my own sake, not for his. Nothing could be more honourable than her treatment of me this morning. And it has barely changed my opinion of her. I break the ninth commandment in my own heart every day—and the tenth.”

She went on with her self-abasement, but it was not of the kind which is so very enjoyable. Gradually it led her to magnify

Madame de Mongelas's virtues till she became inaccurate, as was so often the case, from her anxiety not to be unjust. And she remembered, with a faint glow of pleasure, how implicit she had proved her own trust to be in Arnout's honour only that morning. "Still, I am very glad the woman goes on Monday," she said to herself with a sigh.

She rang her handbell and read out to Betje with unfaltering voice the grievous complaint of the fifty-fifth Psalm: "'For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: . . . but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. . . . The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. . . .'"

She thought the whole contents of the Psalm so remarkably appropriate to the couple upstairs, that she felt it her duty to say at the close, "Let us apply these warnings

to our own hearts, Betje, and not to those of others."

"Yes, indeed," said Betje. "'He shall not suffer the righteous to be moved.' And I do hope you'll sleep, Juffrouw, in spite of all your troubles, which are manifold: though I don't doubt you won't. Good night."

Juffrouw Varelkamp stood on the landing for several minutes irresolute. She wanted to interrupt the singing, and she was too proud to do it. At last she shook her head and opened her bedroom door. It was past eleven when Arnout went up to his room, still humming a tune.

Then the humming stopped. There lay Mynheer van Donselaar's envelope on the table. The envelope recalled the letter, hid away in his pocket-book. Had he forgotten the letter? No.

Yet suddenly in his firmament the golden glow was gone.

“ I must see Dorothy to-morrow,” he said to himself ; “ and I must hear from her own lips that she won’t have me. I can’t believe it. Oh, Dorothy ! Dorothy ! Grâce, grâce pour toi-même—et pour moi.”

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